

THE  
CORNHILL MAGAZINE.

---

APRIL 1893.

---

*MRS. CURGENVEN OF CURGENVEN.*

BY S. BARING-GOULD,  
AUTHOR OF 'MEHALAH,' 'COURT ROYAL,' ETC.

CHAPTER XLIII.

A MEETING.

TING! ting! ting!

The clock on the stairs struck three. Three in the afternoon.  
And then the chimes in it began :

There is nae luck about the house,  
There is nae luck ava'.

The clock had been an acquisition of Captain Curgenven, a lover of mechanism.

Theresa started and shivered.

She was in her boudoir, seated by a small fire, in a dream. At her entreaty Percival had gone back to the Tregonticks along with Justinian for the rabbit shooting. He was reluctant to leave her, but she had insisted. She assured him that it would worry her to think he was detained from his sports, that her mind would be more easy if he went, that she was much better after a night's rest. Percival, always disposed to be sanguine, acquiesced at once in the notion that she was better. He was confident that in a day or two she would be herself again. He held that the doctor had exaggerated her condition. Doctors always do such things so as to enhance their merits if they cure the malady.

But Percival was less willing to accept his dismissal. Notwithstanding his confidence, there lurked a doubt at the bottom of his heart.

'Dear old T——,' said he, 'I can't go and amuse myself when you are ill, and moping in your sick room. 'Pon my life, I shan't enjoy it, I shall be thinking about you.'

Nevertheless she persuaded him to go; she wished it, and her will was the stronger of the two. He promised to be home for dinner, and Theresa undertook to come down to dinner at half-past seven.

He had been away since eleven, and had lunched at the house of the Tregonticks.

As the afternoon crept on, so did Theresa's uneasiness. At four o'clock Physic would be at Tolmenna with the original will, and if it was to be secured, it must be secured then by her. The strokes of the clock on the stairs announcing three came on her like the shock of an earthquake. The decisive moment had arrived when she must go. It mattered not that she was unfit to go, go she must. An interview was before her certain profoundly to agitate her, at a time when she was warned to avoid all agitation. Nevertheless she must run the risk.

She opened the door and stole lightly down the great staircase, walking on the deep pile carpet, and her tread awaking no sound. No one was in the hall.

She had thrown a kerchief over her head, and drawing this closely round her, she went out on the terrace. There was no one about there, and she went to the Bungalow without encountering anyone, or observing anyone, either in the grounds or at a window of the house, the fact being that an Italian boy with a barrel organ and a monkey in an evening dress suit and white tie was at the back door, and servants, gardeners, and grooms had rushed into the kitchen yard to observe the antics of the creature. Theresa could hear the strains of the instrument, and now and then a squeal from a servantmaid, as the monkey ran to her and pulled her apron.

She entered the Bungalow and pushed into the smoking-room, where she hastily took down one of the pistols hung on the rack against the wall, concealed it, and left the Bungalow in the direction of the moor. Her heart was beating fast. The pulses bounded in her throat, and she gasped for breath. But no sooner was she outside the park walls and on the open common than her courage returned, and her heart beat more evenly. She looked round. What a wonderful country that was! In our great cities the mansion of a millionaire and the house crowded with squalid

and starving wretches are within a stone's throw. Here was wild and barren country untouched as in the times when the first savage inhabitants of Britain roved there, and behind the paling—divided by that only—the richest park land, growing cedars and oaks and chestnuts of centuries, on land cultivated through ages, and become docile to the hand of the landscape gardener of the nineteenth century. A thousand years—nay, two thousand intervened between this side and that of the park wicket. Within the gate you and the scenery belonged to the present epoch, outside it—in your modern costume and with your modern ideas—you are an anachronism.

But that was not all. A step from among the trees on to the moor was a step from one atmosphere into another; from the warm, sleepy, soft air of the south into the bracing, stimulating cold air of the north; it was a stride from one latitude to another. Nor was that all. It was a passage from one flora to another; from garden flowers of flaming hue, from spreading forest trees, to pale heather and bog asphodel, to grey moss and lichen soot-black or snow white, and to no sign of tree other than a stunted thorn.

The afternoon was windy; clouds, white, piled up in masses, sailed as icebergs in the cold dark-blue sky, and cast indigo shadows over the moorland. Between the cloud masses the sun fell over stretches of barren waste, lighting it a pale sulphurous yellow. There had been rain. Some of the heavy clouds had burst and poured forth a deluge. Even now to the west all was a blur of blue grey cut by the half-arch of a rainbow.

It seemed to Theresa, as she walked on the springy turf, that her sickness had passed away, that with the fresh moor air she inhaled new strength. Discouragement was gone, she was sanguine of success. Physic was a coward. She had but to frighten him, and he would give way. The jewel-case she had with her, under her cloak and left arm. It was locked, and she had left the key at home in her desk.

The lapwings were wheeling and screaming, and now and then came the pipe of the curlew. A ringoussel started up as Theresa approached some old streaming works, flew a little way, circled, uttered a plaintive remonstrance, rose, flew a little further, again remonstrated, and continued the same course for some distance, then gave it up and disappeared.

Theresa's way led past the Hurlers, rings of upright stones planted in a prehistoric period for an unknown purpose. Three of

these circles remain; a line of stones has been destroyed that at one time stretched across the moor to it, only two of these having been spared, standing about five and a half feet above the ground. The story goes that one Sunday the men of three parishes met on the moor to hurl a silver ball, and see which parish sent forth the man who was the best hurler. But as an interlude they began to throw stones, and they threw the granite slabs to the top of the nearest hill, one on top of the other, which stand to this day, and now constitute the Cheeswring. Then the men of two of the parishes, Linkinghorne and Southill, were faint, and said they would throw no more till they had drunk ale. So they sent off two of their party to run for jars of beer. Then the wrath of heaven was kindled against the Sabbath-breakers, and all were turned into stone, and at a distance from the three circles are to be seen the two messengers petrified in the act of running.<sup>1</sup> In the flying lights and shadows there was something startling in the appearance of these clusters of standing stones about the height of a man, some black with lichen, others white with spar, now dark against a background of moor that lay in sunshine, themselves overshadowed by a sailing cloud. Then the condition was reversed, all the waste behind steeped in purple, these stones gleaming out like ghosts in a dance; and in the rapidly shifting light and shades they seemed endowed with motion, to be tossing, and lightly careering in circle, whilst the two out-runners in stooping position actually appeared to advance in their race for ale. No wonder that the place is avoided at night as 'whisht,' when even by day it has such an unearthly aspect.

But Theresa had no thoughts to bestow on bird or stone; she hugged the precious case to her side, and with her right hand felt the pistol that she had passed through the leather girdle round her waist.

She could not stand still without feeling the earth heave and lurch under her feet, and her head spin. But whilst walking she was unconscious of her weakness; she was animated by the hope to have done for ever with the annoyance caused by Physic. She had resolved, as soon as she had got the will from him, that she would persuade Percival to dismiss the man from his service. One so unscrupulous in the matter of the will would be unscrupulous in other matters.

Theresa had hardly reached Tolmenna before Physic arrived,

<sup>1</sup> So the story as told the author near the spot.



riding up on a grey cob. He wore tight breeches and boots. In his hand was a crop. He had on a long great coat.

'How do, ma'am?' said he with an insolently familiar nod as he trotted past. 'I'll hitch up and be at your service directly.' Then changing his mind he drew rein. 'I say—I heard a rumour that your ladyship was ill, so I e'en rode to Curgenven to inquire. They told me you were better, but not fit to come downstairs. On my word, I didn't expect to see you here, after that. I came on to have a look at my bit of property, where I'm going to open a mine.' He turned his keen eyes round, raised his voice, and shouted, 'Halloo there! What, you gal! what are you doing on my lands? I'll have you up for trespass. Weeping, like Marius, over the ruins; hanging up your harp on the willow trees, eh?' This to Esther, whom his sharp eye had detected.

He was off his cob in a minute. 'Look here, gal,' said he, 'you take the bridle and lead my grey up and down, and I'll give you a fourpenny bit, which is more money than you have earned honestly so far, and having got will know how to spend.'

He threw the rein to Esther, who came forward sullenly and doubtfully, and seemed inclined to refuse. When, however, she saw that Physic wished to speak to Mrs. Curgenven, she took the rein with an impatient jerk of the hand and a toss of her head.

'Now look here, young savage,' said Physic. 'I've a word or two with this lady here that ain't for your ears. It's about the mine, it is, I'm going to open here, wheal<sup>1</sup> something or other. I'll call it after her, whatever her Christian name is, with her good permission, and that's what I'll ask her, so sheer off to leeward.'

Esther looked at Theresa with inquiry, and when she saw that it was the lady's desire that she should comply with the orders given, she led the horse away in the direction of the Hurlers, and a mass of granite fragments heaped into a cairn hid her from the agent and Theresa.

'So then,' said Physic, 'you've come notwithstanding sickness, or was that put on, eh? You don't relish the prospect of turning out into the cold. I would not were I in the squire's place or yours. By George! it makes me laugh to think how cleverly you played your little game. I confess I was taken aback, and could not understand it when you gave me the sack. "Why!" said I to myself, "confound the woman, is she demented? Here is she without a penny to bless herself with, and when she gets an offer

<sup>1</sup> Wheal (huel) is Cornish for mine.

from me—an offer at which ten thousand girls would jump—she refuses me.” I couldn’t make out the sense of it. I knew you were clever. I didn’t know how clever. I allow you, I was sore when I heard that Mr. Percival had succeeded in securing you, or rather that you had succeeded in securing him. But I laughed. It was darned clever, and it explained the puzzle. However, you don’t escape scot free. You’ll have to pay me for the honour and enjoyment of being squires of Curgenven. So now—which is it to be—a thousand pound cheque or the jewel box?’

‘Have you brought the will?’

‘Rather think I have.’

‘Not a copy? The original?’

‘Do you doubt me? Fair dealing is my word.’

‘Mr. Physic,’ said Theresa, ‘I have been ill, and ordered by the doctor not to be excited, or to be troubled about any matter, as my heart is affected. I have come here this evening at great risk to myself, and I ask you, under the circumstances, to give me a little longer time in which to consider what you have said, and the alternatives set before me.’

‘Not another day, not another hour! Very sorry, ’pon my soul I am, that you’ve been ill. I can see it in your handsome face that you ain’t up to mark. But, bless you! it’s like having a tooth drawn, the worst is the making up your mind to it. It’s the thinking over them beautiful diamonds and emeralds as has upset you. Of course it is. A lady don’t fancy parting with such things as those. It is like taking the blood out of her heart. I’m tremendously sorry you have been worried over them jewels, but it comes in the course of business. It’s a deal; you give me the jewels and I’ll give you the will. I reckon it’s worth more to you to have the will than to have a few trays of gewgaws. Why—the will means a comfortable house, a fine estate, and a position as a county lady. You will have the means of buying other jewelry—any amount of sham, and who’s to tell that it is sham? I know what you’re afraid of—lest these should be asked after. Leave that to me. I’ll get you shams as’ll pass very well. You haven’t said a word to the squire, I suppose, about this affair?’

Theresa shook her head. She had drawn her long dark cloak about her, and wrapped it round her with her arms crossed under the cloak. Very white and deathlike her face appeared by contrast with the black cloth cloak. The cloak was one Percival had given her, a Belgian cloak, such as is worn by the women in the

markets of Bruges and Ghent, with a silk-lined hood, and a brass clasp at the breast. She had tied a purple silk kerchief over her hair, knotted under her chin.

'You insist on the things being settled at once?' she asked in a low tone, and slowly.

'Most assuredly. Look here. I'm going to work a company and have a mine here, and I need money to set the affair on wheels.'

'Let me look at the will.'

He put his hand into a pocket of his long great coat, a pocket on the inside, and drew forth a packet.

'Here you are,' said he. 'And I pray you to observe that I have got capacious pockets. I came provided so that I could stow the jewel case away in one of them.'

'Give me the will.'

'Thank you,' said Physic with a laugh, 'give you the will, and away you would run fleet as a doe, thinking to make off with it, and without fulfilling your part of the bargain. How am I to know that you have brought the jewel case with you?'

'Satisfy yourself with your own eyes.'

Theresa drew forth the case and held it before her.

'Very well,' said the agent. 'So far so good. Now, you put that in my hand, and I will put the document you so covet into yours. We'll deliver up simultaneously.'

Slapping his boot with his crop he turned and looked about him. Esther was not visible, but the cob was; she had thrown herself down on the granite cairn, and was allowing the cob to munch the grass as far as he could reach, restrained by her hand and the bridle, that she had unbuckled on one side of the bit.

'It's all right,' said Physic. He put the whip into his mouth, across, and held out the will with one hand whilst laying hold eagerly of the case with the other.

Theresa at once secured the will in her bosom.

'Wait—my beauty!' said the agent, removing the whip from his mouth, 'I've not done yet. Where is the key?'

'Here!' exclaimed Theresa, suddenly drawing the pistol, and presenting it at his head.

Physic sprang back.

'Now,' said Theresa, 'give me back the case immediately.'

'Oh, yes,' answered the agent, recovering himself. 'A pretty trick for a stage player. But it won't do; you can't scare me. Why, bless you! you ain't got the pistol cocked, much less charged.'

Theresa at once drew back the cock.

‘Give me up the jewel case!’

Physic whirled his crop about to bring it down across her hand. ‘You hit me once across the knuckles,’ said Physic savagely; ‘now I’ll pay you with interest. By George! I’ll give you a wale across them lily-whites!’

He swung the crop again, and set his teeth. In a moment, before the blow fell, there was an explosion.

Theresa saw the flash, felt the shock in her hand without understanding what had happened; saw Physic stagger, as though tipsy, and fall in a heap on the sward.

---

## CHAPTER XLIV.

### OFF.

THERESA stood like one of the Hurlers or Runners, motionless, petrified. She could not realise at once what had happened; she was not conscious of having drawn the trigger. Her finger had contracted instinctively before the fall of the whip. That the pistol was loaded had not entered her imagination. She had forgotten altogether that Esther had charged it, offered it to her, and, when she had declined to experimentalise with it, had replaced it loaded on the rack a few days ago. She had thought to frighten Physic, certainly not to kill him. He lay motionless before her, with a bullet in his heart. Theresa’s senses were sharpened to acuteness at that moment; she saw, and heard, and smelt with preternatural keenness—saw Physic on the ground, with two boot-soles turned towards her, and saw that the sole of one boot had been patched, and that the patching nails were bright; she heard the cob whinny; and she smelt gunpowder. But she could not think; she could not put together the chain of events, and understand how this terrible accident had taken place. She was roused by the voice of Esther.

‘Oh, jimmeny! You’ve done it!’

She tried to turn her head and to speak; she could do neither. Esther went to the fallen man, touched him, looked in his face, and came back to Theresa.

‘He’s dead, I reckon, dead as a want (mole) on a linney (cattle-shed) door. Whativer is to be done?’

Theresa was in no condition to speak.

'I say—now,' Esther looked at the dead man, then at the lady, 'tes a hanging matter, I reckon. Lord! I often said as I would like to do it, and do it I would; but now 'tes done, it's another matter altogether, and I never 'd ha' picked up courage to do it. But, Lor'! what is to be done now? It'll niver do for them to take you to prison and hang you—a lady, and so good. I'll tell 'ee what—I'll take it all on myself. Ees—I will for sure sartain, and let'm try to catch me. They won't do it. There, lady! don't y' take on and be afraid. I'll pretend I did it; and if they do hang me, it's no great odds, I'm sure.'

Theresa did not stir, she remained stupefied with terror; then Esther laid hold of her arm, shook her, and walked with her a few paces away from the corpse.

'Look ye here,' said Esther, 'what do y' mean now by holding thickey pistern? Why, them as seed y' wi' her sure enough would say you did it. Give her to me.'

She twisted the weapon out of the hand of Theresa, who now drew a long breath, and put up her hand to her brow. When her eyes no longer rested on the body with the upturned patched boot-soles, her spellbound condition began to yield.

'It couldn't be helped,' said Esther, reassuringly. 'I reckon that when gran'mither cast the eye on him and ill-wished him, it were sure to come from one or other. He ought never to ha' turned us out o' Tolmenna. He brought it on his own head. What had he done to y' that you took the pistern to'n? But never mind, you can tell me that another day. Now be peart (smart), and get back to Curgenven, and leave the rest to me.'

Theresa was in that condition in which obedience to another's will was the only course she could take. She could neither think for herself, nor consider the consequences of what had taken place; she therefore drew her cloak about her with a cramp-like spasm, and walked in the direction indicated by Esther, at first slowly, hardly dragging one foot after the other, then quicker, and finally almost at a run. As she placed distance between herself and the corpse, animation returned, her muscles became flexible, her pulses throbbled, and the terror, instead of striking her with paralysis, became a goad urging her to fly the spot. Panting, shuddering, bathed in perspiration, she passed through the park, re-entered the house, and regained her room unnoticed. When there she divested herself of kerchief and cloak, put them away, and then sank into her chair, covered her eyes, and burst into tears.

Wherever she went, whatever she undertook, she was led into disaster; she had, however, never previously been brought into such a situation as the present, that threatened not herself only, but the whole family into which she had been taken.

In the meanwhile Esther had stepped back to the body; she knelt beside it, and assured herself that life was extinct. Then she stood with folded arms, her feet in a heather bush, musing, and looking at the dead man. She had the pistol in her hand. She was not oppressed with any of the horror or fear that had taken hold of Theresa. In her rude mind she was not capable of realising all that death was. The man who had sent her grandfather to prison, who had turned the old people and herself out of their house and had torn it down, was lying dead before her, and he had been served as he deserved. He was now innocuous, and the main thought that occupied her mind was whether it would now be possible for her grandparents to return to Tolmenna and rebuild the ruins. She had hated the agent, and yet, as he lay before her dead, with his ugly face turned to the light, and the flying shadows and sunbeams dancing over it, she was conscious of a sense of pity.

‘Deary me, now!’ said she. ‘T’es curious. I couldn’ kill the hoodwall, and I took aim at’n. I reckon ’twere this very pistern; and sure then I said I’d never ’a missed had I fired at Physic. But I’m not so sartain neither now if he’d ’a stood facin’ me as I’d ’a had the sperit to do it. Deary life, it’s edication does it. There’s me can’t read vitty at all, and the lady there—as easy as anything. Her shot’n—straight on end. It’s edication does it.’

She stooped and looked at Physic once more, and now saw the jewel case that had fallen from his hand in the convulsion of death.

She recognised this at once, and wondered how he had come by it. She took it up, and going to the ruins of the cottage secreted it in a place she well knew under the floor, where her grandfather had been accustomed to hide his money.

Then she walked away in the direction of cultivated land.

As she was descending from the moor into a lane she met Pike the horsebreaker, leading Physic’s cob by the rein.

‘I say, Esther Morideg! Have y’ seen Mr. Physic anywheres? Here’s his cob running loose. He passed my house not an hour ago, and said to my missus he were going to Tolmenna about his mine. I caught the cob running down the lane.’

'Physic is dead!' said Esther. 'I've shot'n; and here's the pistern. Take it back to Curgenven.'

'You've shot him?'

'Aye, I reckon. Why did he turn gran'fer out o' the house? What else could he expect, and ill-wished too by gran'mother!'

'Physic dead!'

'Aye! and here be the pistern as have done it. I borrowed her t'other day I were i' the Bungalow up to Curgenven, and I took away the pistern wi' me. I thought I'd punish that chap for turning us out o' our house, and tearing it abroad. I've done it, and there be the tool back. They'll be after me to put me i' the clink, I reckon, so I'm off.'

She gave him the pistol.

'No, thank you,' said he. 'They'll be having me pinned up if they find me wi' that. You come along of me to where there's someone else and tell the tale, and then it's right enough.'

'Very well.'

'Come along to the old turnpike, my missus 'll hear what you have to say, and then you can leave the pistol there and welcome, but I wi'n't take it wi'out a witness, and risk the noose round my neck. He were an aggravating sort o' a chap, he were, and I don't blame you. He didn't treat your folks as 'a ought to 'a treated 'em, and this be the consekence. Well, it's a pity if they swing you, and a shame too. But I've gotten all I wanted from Physic, and so I don't bear him a grudge. If it 'd been your gran'fer as 'ad done it, I shouldn't ha' been surprised, but it's lively games for a giglot (young girl).'

As Pike walked alongside of Esther he turned his eyes out of their corners to observe her. She strode along the lane with light tread, upright as a wand, easy in every movement, her head erect, covered with its dense cloud of shining hair.

A sense of compunction came over him. This handsome girl—was he to be the means of bringing her to her death? He would not have liked to ride a well-formed colt so as to break its wind or throw it down and cut its knees, and he did not relish the thought of having a hand in the destruction of so splendid a girl.

'I say, Esther,' he began, 'I don't care to ha' naught to do wi't.'

'Wi' what, maister?'

'Why, sure enough, wi' your being hanged. I don't say but wi' the agravation, Physic desarved it all, and that I wouldn't 'a



done the like myself in a like agravation, but I'm not over pleased to put my fingers into the matter.'

'It won't hurt y'.'

'No—it won't hurt me. But I don't care to have to appear against you, maiden, and mebbe say what may cause you to swing. I shu'dn't be easy after.'

'You needn't be afeared, Turnypike, they'll niver catch me. How can they? There's nobody knows the moor as I do. Why—if I ran out over Trewortha marsh, could they follow? I reckon if they tried they'd be stopped. Or Crowdy marsh nother—that's every bit and crumb as bad. And the rocks and stones o' Brownwilly and Roughtor. Be there not scores on scores o' hiding places there?'

'That's well enough, but you can't live on air.'

'Who'd tell tales o' me? Never you fear. Folks wouldn't let me starve when they knowed I were in hiding. I tell y' nigh to Roughtor is a fogou (cave)——'

'Nay, not a word, I don't want to hear nothing, about hiding places. I wish you'd go and tell your tale about shooting thickey chap to someone else. I tell y' clean out—I won't know naught more about it, and here's good-bye according.'

He jumped on Physic's horse that he had been leading, and galloped down the lane and out upon the road, where he dismounted and turned the cob adrift.

'I will go to Turnipike's missus for all that,' said Esther, and walked on. She had hardly reached the road before she met the rector, combing his whiskers, and blandly smiling at first one hedge and then the other, as though they were dissenters to be conciliated.

'Pars'n!' said Esther, striding up to him, 'can y' write now?'

'Write, my child, of course I can. Don't I write two sermons every week and three in Lent?'

'Will y' now come in wi' me to Betsy Pike's, and write out what I want to say?'

'Certainly, with the utmost alacrity. And what is it about?'

'About that ou'd Physic.'

'Physic! What about him?'

'About the shutting of him.'

'Shutting—shutting, where has he been shut up?'

'He's a shut through the heart, and dead as a want (mole).'

'Gracious me!'

The rector stood still, and his jaw dropped.

'I'd like y' pars'n to take down all I've gotten to say about it.'

And there—there's the pistern as did it. Smell to it, her's got the smitch (smell) o' powder about her still.'

'Merciful goodness!' Mr. Pamphlet remained motionless, gasping.

'And I want y' to put it all down on paper how it were a done.'

'Shot—Mr. Physic shot! You wicked girl, you are making a joke—a miserable practical joke!'

'It's all right,' said Esther. 'Come wi' me if you doubt, and I'll show you where he lies at Tolmenna. What made he go for to drive gran'fer and us—me and my ou'd grammer out o' the house for, if he didn't expect a breakfast off lead? My grammer ill wished him, and it's come to pass. Her said it would. Will y' now please come and put it all down in writing? And please tak' the pistern and give her to the perlice.'

'I!—I!—I!'

Mr. Pamphlet flushed the colour of a mulberry. 'I'll have nothing whatever to do with this. I mixed up in a police case like this! I have to appear in a court as witness, and be cross-questioned; it might interfere with my prospects, I mean my ministerial efficacy. I'll have nothing to do with it. Don't touch me! Don't let me see that horrible pistol, go away! Go away! Gracious! go away! Don't come near me—don't stop me!' and the Revd. Mr. Rector walked, almost ran, to escape the girl.

Esther stood irresolute for a few moments, looking after him, when she heard a sharp peremptory voice demand, 'What is the matter?'

She turned and saw Jane Curgenven leading Physic's cob. That good lady had been paying a parochial visit to the Turnpikes, to administer advice, reprimand, and a tract, and her father had promised to walk along the road and meet her as she returned. On leaving the cottage of the Pikes, Jane had found the agent's cob cropping the grass by the roadside, and had arrested it by the bridle, and was leading the animal. She concluded that the agent had hitched his beast up outside a farm or cottage whilst he entered on business, and that it had broken away. She would lead the cob to Curgenven, and then Physic could have it from the stables when he came for it.

'What is the matter?' asked Jane, surprised to see her father careering along the road at so exceptional a rate, so inconsistent with his rectorial dignity.

'Pars'n is right curious,' said Esther. 'I told 'n somethin', and I axed 'n something, and it made 'n run like a mazed hare.'

done the like myself in a like agravation, but I'm not over pleased to put my fingers into the matter.'

'It won't hurt y'.'

'No—it won't hurt me. But I don't care to have to appear against you, maiden, and mebbe say what may cause you to swing. I shu'dn't be easy after.'

'You needn't be afear'd, Turnypike, they'll niver catch me. How can they? There's nobody knows the moor as I do. Why—if I ran out over Trewortha marsh, could they follow? I reckon if they tried they'd be stopped. Or Crowdy marsh nother—that's every bit and crumb as bad. And the rocks and stones o' Brownwilly and Roughtor. Be there not scores on scores o' hiding places there?'

'That's well enough, but you can't live on air.'

'Who'd tell tales o' me? Never you fear. Folks wouldn't let me starve when they knowed I were in hiding. I tell y' nigh to Roughtor is a fogou (cave)——'

'Nay, not a word, I don't want to hear nothing, about hiding places. I wish you'd go and tell your tale about shooting thickey chap to someone else. I tell y' clean out—I won't know naught more about it, and here's good-bye according.'

He jumped on Physic's horse that he had been leading, and galloped down the lane and out upon the road, where he dismounted and turned the cob adrift.

'I will go to Turnipike's missus for all that,' said Esther, and walked on. She had hardly reached the road before she met the rector, combing his whiskers, and blandly smiling at first one hedge and then the other, as though they were dissenters to be conciliated.

'Pars'n!' said Esther, striding up to him, 'can y' write now?'

'Write, my child, of course I can. Don't I write two sermons every week and three in Lent?'

'Will y' now come in wi' me to Betsy Pike's, and write out what I want to say?'

'Certainly, with the utmost alacrity. And what is it about?'

'About that ou'd Physic.'

'Physic! What about him?'

'About the shutting of him.'

'Shutting—shutting, where has he been shut up?'

'He's a shut through the heart, and dead as a want (mole).'

'Gracious me!'

The rector stood still, and his jaw dropped.

'I'd like y' pars'n to take down all I've gotten to say about it.'

And there—there's the pistern as did it. Smell to it, her's got the smitch (smell) o' powder about her still.'

'Merciful goodness!' Mr. Pamphlet remained motionless, gasping.

'And I want y' to put it all down on paper how it were a done.'

'Shot—Mr. Physic shot! You wicked girl, you are making a joke—a miserable practical joke!'

'It's all right,' said Esther. 'Come wi' me if you doubt, and I'll show you where he lies at Tolmenna. What made he go for to drive gran'fer and us—me and my ou'd grammer out o' the house for, if he didn't expect a breakfast off lead? My grammer ill wished him, and it's come to pass. Her said it would. Will y' now please come and put it all down in writing? And please tak' the pistern and give her to the perlice.'

'I!—I!—I!'

Mr. Pamphlet flushed the colour of a mulberry. 'I'll have nothing whatever to do with this. I mixed up in a police case like this! I have to appear in a court as witness, and be cross-questioned; it might interfere with my prospects, I mean my ministerial efficacy. I'll have nothing to do with it. Don't touch me! Don't let me see that horrible pistol, go away! Go away! Gracious! go away! Don't come near me—don't stop me!' and the Revd. Mr. Rector walked, almost ran, to escape the girl.

Esther stood irresolute for a few moments, looking after him, when she heard a sharp peremptory voice demand, 'What is the matter?'

She turned and saw Jane Curgenven leading Physic's cob. That good lady had been paying a parochial visit to the Turnpikes, to administer advice, reprimand, and a tract, and her father had promised to walk along the road and meet her as she returned. On leaving the cottage of the Pikes, Jane had found the agent's cob cropping the grass by the roadside, and had arrested it by the bridle, and was leading the animal. She concluded that the agent had hitched his beast up outside a farm or cottage whilst he entered on business, and that it had broken away. She would lead the cob to Curgenven, and then Physic could have it from the stables when he came for it.

'What is the matter?' asked Jane, surprised to see her father careering along the road at so exceptional a rate, so inconsistent with his rectorial dignity.

'Pars'n is right curious,' said Esther. 'I told 'n somethin', and I axed 'n something, and it made 'n run like a mazed hare.'

‘What was it?’

‘It were naught but I told ’n as Lawyer Physic were dead. He be shut through the heart, and I axed ’n to take the pistern and write down what I had to say.’

‘Physic dead?’

‘Ees. Folks mostly be when they’s shut. That’s the reason why his cob be a runnin’ loose.’

‘Come with me this instant,’ said Jane Curgenven. ‘Come with me this instant, you abominable girl. Come with me to Mrs. Pike’s house. I’ll have this cleared up at once, and I’ll lock you up there in the coalhole, till I can send for the police to have you taken to prison.’

‘No—not that,’ said Esther, with a contemptuous shrug of her shoulders and toss of her glowing head of hair. ‘I’ll not be took and pined i’ a gaol, not I. But there—take the pistern. Thickey’s the chap as did it. Her as shut’n ain’t such a terrible distance off. If you like to say ’twere I, you’re welcome. None else were near. That’s why I come here, and axed pars’n to take it all down. Now you know about it. There’s the pistern, and you can tell the perlice, but take me they shan’t.’

She put the pistol into Jane Curgenven’s hand, turned, ran up the lane towards the moor, and was lost.

Jane Curgenven with promptitude faced about, and still leading Physic’s cob went back to the cottage she had left recently. There she halted at the door, and called out the two eldest children, Tom and Jesse.

‘Tom,’ said she, ‘jump into the saddle, and ride as hard as you can gallop for the police, and here’s sixpence for your pains.’ Then to herself, ‘I must see that Esther be caught and brought to the gallows.’

‘Jesse,’ said she, ‘go as fast as you can toddle for the doctor, and here is twopence for your trouble.’ Then to herself, ‘I must see what can be done for Physic, before it be too late.’

---

## CHAPTER XLV.

### CHEATED.

NEVER within the memory of man was such commotion caused in Curgenven as by the tidings that rapidly spread relative to the murder of Physic, the agent—no, not even by the suicide of Cap-

tain Lambert. The latter was a death leading to no very serious consequences, or no more serious consequences than a shift in the squireship. The present death entailed as a corollary a capital trial, and 'someone to swing for it,' as it was expressed. Who that someone was hardly anybody doubted; and it added to the zest of the excitement that this somebody was a female, and one whom all had regarded with suspicion, if not with disgust. The schoolmaster had something to say about it, and to show how it all came of Esther not having reached the second standard. The Scripture reader had something to say about it, and to put it down to her having boiled her kettle with his 'Are you converted?'—a tract he had specially commended to her. The mission woman had something to say about it. She attributed the crime to Esther's not having been confirmed.

The women of Curgenven village ran in and out of each other's houses, talking over what had taken place. No woman was to be found in her own dwelling; everyone had entertained mistrust of Esther; everyone had expected that the turning of the Moridegs out of Tolmenna would bring bad luck on the head of Lawyer Physic.

The men congregated after work hours in the public-house or coffee tavern and concurred in their view that it served Physic right; that they did not pity him, yet that nevertheless they could not cordially approve of the method adopted for ridding the estate and neighbourhood of him.

The children in the school could neither do an addition sum rightly nor spell a sentence correctly, the day following the death of Physic. The farmers could get no work done on their farms. The labourers were engaged in discussing the event, not on driving their ploughs.

All day long a train of pilgrims visited the scene of the murder; and all who visited the spot brought away with them some memento of the crime—a blade of grass on which the dead man had lain, a bit of moss stained with blood, a smoked wad from the pistol, a chip off the block of stone against which his head had rested. In mediæval times people greedily collected relics of martyrs, nowadays they gather relics of murderers or the murdered with equal greed. The gardeners of Curgenven Hall congregated in the potting-shed and let the fire go out in the furnace that warmed the conservatories. The coachman and grooms sat over the fire in the saddle-room, smoking, and sent into the house for cider, over which to argue relative to the chances of Esther being

caught. In the dairy the milk was burnt when the cream was being scalded, and the pigs in the sty went that day without their bucket of wash ; but the fowls had a double feed of Indian corn, hastily thrown them by the maid without stopping to measure the proper allowance. In the kitchen the soup was allowed to boil over and perfume the whole house with its savour on the red-hot stove plate, and the butler sent out a silver egg-spoon and a dessert fork for the kitchen-maid to empty down the sink. No one in all Curgenven could think of anything but the murder, and everyone expressed an opinion thereon save two people—the rector, who reserved his, and Theresa, who was not, at her husband's insistence, told of it.

It was known that the police constable had been summoned by Mrs. Curgenven the elder, that she had stated to him that Esther Morideg had confessed to her the murder of Mr. Physic, and had given her the pistol with which the murder was committed. It was further known that the constable had viewed the body, along with the surgeon, and found life extinct, and that he had gone off at once to endeavour to arrest Esther in the temporary habitation occupied by her grandparents ; that he had failed to find her there, or to obtain any information as to her whereabouts from the old people ; that accordingly he had returned to Curgenven, where he had demanded a warrant from Mr. Percival Curgenven, who was a magistrate ; and that, armed with this warrant, he had departed for Liskeard to consult the head of the police.

The footman from the hall was suddenly elevated to being the hero of the day, for he could tell how he had seen Esther Morideg fire out of the window of the Bungalow, and how she had asked him to stand that she might have a shot at him, and how she had then and there declared her intention to take the life of Mr. Physic, to which threat he, John Thomas, had not paid much attention at the time, thinking it mere bravado ; and he had overheard expressions of anger made use of by the girl at having been dispossessed of the house at Tolmenna, but which now he was ready to swear to before the judges, and stand to. The butler, not to be behind, declared that he was the last person who had seen Mr. Physic alive, as he had called at the house to inquire after 'Missus.' That cannot have been more than half an hour before he was shot.

Then Pike, the horsebreaker, finding that John Thomas was the lion of the day, put in his claim to be a lion also in a degree



still higher. He had seen Esther Morideg immediately after the murder walking with the pistol in her hand, and smelling of gunpowder down to her toes. And Esther had told him that Lawyer Physic were shot. 'But,' said Pike, with a qualm of pity for the girl, 'he would swear before the most intelligent jury, and the oldest and venerablest judge in England, that she said it was pure accident; that is to say, Lawyer Physic had been impertinent to her, and in self-defence she'd done it.'

'Ah!' said some of the women, 'he was a cruel impident piece o' goods.'

'Ise sure,' said a very ugly old spinster, 'he made eyes at me oft enough as though he'd eat me; and what he'd 'a said had I give he the chance the Lord knows.'

But the view that Physic had been killed by accident or by Esther in self-defence did not find general favour. It was not to be denied that the Moridegs had been given the utmost provocation; that the old man had threatened 'to do' for the agent; that he had already been in prison for having attacked him; and it was argued that as the girl had gloried in her grandfather's act, she had endeavoured to outdo it. Then the story rapidly evolved myth about it. Someone had said that Physic had been killed, not by a bullet from a pistol, but by a slug from the old moorman's gun. This, having been partly overheard, was seized on by the person who half-heard it, and who, being desirous of heightening the tragedy, declared he had heard that when found Physic was half eaten by slugs, that had worked their way into his heart and liver. Whereupon the blacksmith, who set up to be an original thinker and an agnostic, said the whole story was false, no murder had been committed, but the agent had died of a sluggish liver. Some youths who were wont to hang about the forge, or who affected to be free-thinkers, though actually incapable of thinking either freely or in bands, adopted the blacksmith's view, and said that they did not believe in the pistol, and that Esther was an uncommonly handsome girl, and there was no harm in her. It was naught but jealousy and spite accusing her of a crime that had not been committed. Thereupon all the elderly, ugly, and married women, and all the pretty young and unmarried women as well, ran together as drops of mercury and coalesced in one body of opinion, that certainly Esther was guilty, that she was vicious by nature, of a malignant humour, capable of any crime, and entirely devoid of good looks as she was of Christianity. Finally, the whole popula-

tion of Curgenven was broken up into factions, one holding that Esther had shot the agent, another that he had been shot by the grandfather, a third that he had not been shot at all, but had died suddenly of a sluggish liver, or something like it, somehow connected with slugs.

Theresa had returned home in a condition of mental numbness, dominated by terror, not for herself. She did not consider the danger to which she was exposed, she was conscious only of the fact that she had taken a life—that a man who lived, and thought, and schemed, and in his fashion enjoyed himself, had by her act been thrust out of this world through the veil into the unseen.

She had never intended this, never thought of violently sweeping the man who tormented her from her path. She had hoped to frighten him; the rector had suggested that she should do this. She did not know that the pistol was loaded. It had not occurred to her to essay whether it were or not. She had not loaded it herself, and she was too bewildered to be able to consider how it was that it came to be charged with powder and shot, and provided with a cap.

She could see before her everywhere those upturned boot-soles with their patches, one patched across the front, the other half-heeled. Physis trod down his right boot on the inside, and was continually obliged to have pieces put on to rectify the abrasions. In this new portion the nails were bright and of brass, the nails did not show in the older portion of the sole. If Theresa looked at a picture, the soles stood between her and it, and behind the soles was a black shapeless shadow. If she looked at her bed, the soles were there, thrust out from under the valance; out of the window—they were between her and the landscape. Moreover, the scent of the powder followed her. The flowers on her table, the geraniums on the stairs, all exhaled a savour of exploded gunpowder.

Her maid came up with the tray, and beef-tea and toast. The beef-tea steamed like powder, the toast tasted of it. Theresa turned her head aside, she could not endure the food.

Hours passed, the night closed in. She sat looking into the fire, and seeing soles in the coals thrust out between the bars, then disappearing, and fresh boot-soles appearing. She became restless, feverish with impatience when none were distinguishable, waiting, expecting till they reappeared somewhere among the coals or among the flames.

Then Mr. Curgenven arrived. He had been summoned from the shooting party to sign a warrant to enable the police to arrest Esther Morideg, suspected of having caused the death of Mr. Physic. He had listened to the story, had done what was required of him, and then gave orders to the servants to maintain silence on the matter before their mistress, whose health would not suffer her to be agitated.

He came upstairs to see her, to kiss her, take her hand, and feel whether it were cold or feverish, and inquire how she was. He was shocked and alarmed at her appearance, the stony look of her face, the sunken eyes, the bloodless lips. Never before had she failed to respond to his tenderness, to smile when he came in, and address him with pleasant words of welcome. But now she seemed hardly to see him, the muscles of her face were set as though they would never relax, and her tongue was tied that she could not speak.

He was concerned. Instead of being better than when he left her, she was markedly worse. He determined to send for the doctor, and urged her at once to go to bed.

She listlessly assented, and when he had left and sent up her maid, allowed herself to be undressed. But on the servant beginning to remove Theresa's gown, there fell from her breast the long envelope that contained the will. She had forgotten it till that moment. The maid, by stooping to pick it up, attracted her attention; animation was restored, and snatching the envelope from the girl's hands, she said, 'Leave me! Leave me for ten minutes. I do not want you,' and stood trembling and watching till the maid had closed the door behind her.

The fixity in which her faculties had been sealed was gone, exchanged for a flutter of conflicting emotions. She thought now of the will, no more of that ghastly spectacle of upturned boot-soles on the moor. She had the will—she had that very document for which she had risked so much; and now, with the fire burning in the grate, it was in her power to destroy it, and put an end for ever to the anxiety and threat of trouble this hateful document carried with it.

She hastily tore open the envelope, walked to the dressing-table, where two candles were burning beside the looking-glass, and spread the will out upon the mirror, that she might satisfy her eyes that she really did have in her power the coveted document. She read it through in feverish haste. As she read she

recalled every word. It was the same that she had seen at Physic's office, and yet——

She dropped one hand that was holding the paper, and in so doing struck over one of the candles, that fell, and was broken and extinguished on the carpet. She did not notice this, she caught the paper up and held it to the other candle, and looked at the signatures. The paper was not the same.

No, it was not the same. She had been cheated. Physic had passed off on her a copy. On the original was a seal. Lambert had not only signed his name, but after signing it he had sealed it, out of some fancy that to seal as well as to sign was necessary to give force to such a deed. He had sealed it with his signet that bore the Curgenven crest. On this there was no seal, nothing but the signatures copied. It was a transcript. A scalding rush of blood poured through the veins of Theresa. After all, Physic had meant to deceive her, to sell her a worthless copy, and retain in his hands the original wherewith still to threaten her.

Every particle of remorse or regret for having caused his death, every atom of pity for the man died out of her soul, never again to revive. He had brought her that copy with protests of straight dealing, and he had met with his desert.

But a second thought now swelled up in her mind, taking from her breath, and sight, and hearing.

Where was the jewel case?

She had put it into Physic's hands, and then had endeavoured by a threat to recover it from him. The pistol had been discharged, he had fallen; and in that moment of supreme horror, she had forgotten wholly the existence of the case, and that it had been left in his hands.

A sickening terror oppressed her. That case would be found with the dead man, and through it the truth must come out.

How could the truth be concealed? That jewel case would be recognised, and it would be known that she, and she only, had been in possession of it. The conclusion certain to be reached was that she had had something to do with Physic either immediately before or at the very moment of his death. How else could his having the Curgenven jewel case and the presence of the Curgenven pistol be accounted for? Suspicion must inevitably fall on her——and then!——and then!

The copy of the will was worthless. She threw it into the fire, and when it was consumed, cast herself on the bed and

covered her eyes with her hands : not to sleep for one quarter of an hour all that long night ; not to toss from side to side, but to lie in one position, with her hands over her burning eyes thinking, but never reaching any solution that could give her rest.

## CHAPTER XLVI.

## IN THE SMOKE.

ROGER MORIDEG and his wife were seated in the shed converted temporarily into a habitation ; a fire was burning in the middle, a fire of skin-turf, and the smoke found its way out as best it might through the thatch, so that from without the hovel had the appearance of a steaming dunghill. To ordinary eyes and lungs the atmosphere within would have been unendurable, but it did not affect either sensibly. Old Roger was adding to the fume by smoking his broken black pipe, and his wife Tamsin was swinging herself whilst knitting, and singing a ballad :

There was a woman, and a widow was she,  
The red, the green, and the yellow !  
A daughter she had as the elm tree,<sup>1</sup>  
Oh ! the flowers that bloom in the valley !

Then the old man withdrew his pipe from his mouth and joined in the chorus, taking a third below the melody :

The harp, the lute, the fife, the flute and the cymbal.  
Sweet goes the treble violin,  
Oh ! the flowers that bloom in the valley !

The knitter continued :

There came a knight all clothed in red,  
The red, the green, and the yellow !  
Oh ! and will you be——

When the door was thrown open and Esther came in.

‘Now,’ said she, ‘give kimby.’<sup>2</sup> I’ve news.’

‘What be it ? No kimby till I knows what the news be.’

‘Physic is dead—lyin’ dead to Tolmenna, and folks do say as I’ve a shut’n !’

‘How can that be ?’ asked Roger, turning to where his gun usually hung, but, owing to the smoke, being unable to see it, he put forth his hand and felt it. ‘Aye ! here her be. I reckon you can’t shut wi’out the instrument to do’t wi’.’

<sup>1</sup> The Cornish elm, that grows as a poplar or a pine, small-leaved.

<sup>2</sup> A handsel for good news.

'Tis true,' said Esther, 'Physic be lyin' dead, however it be he's 'a gotten his death. But this I know, folks 'll put it on me.'

'That's like enough,' said Roger. 'There's reason there.'

'And I must be off and hide, or I'll be ta'en and put i' the clink where you was, gran'fer, and not get out so soon and so peart as you.'

'Folks'll put it on us, for sartain sure,' said Tamsin, 'as you, Roger, bear'n a malice, and I 'a ill-wished'n. Us 'a said us wished the lawyer-chap dead, and they'll say us killed'n. It's as true that as fingers be fingers and not toes.'

'It's me, gran'fer, as they'll be after, and I must just run for't. I know very well where I'll go, but I shall want a thing or two, so as——'

'And where's that?'

'I wi'n't tell,' answered Esther. 'Then you can say you dun' know. It's waste o' good words telling lies, and there's no pleasure in it where there's no cause.'

'But how did Lawyer Physic come to die?' asked Roger.

'I'll tell y' what he looks like now, gran'fer,' said Esther. 'But if you ask me how he come to look like this, why, I wi'n't say, not but that I could if I would.'

After she had given a vigorous and graphic account of the condition of the corpse, Roger shook his head.

'You didn't do it wi' a moorstone, that's sartain, nor wi' my gun, for there she be. But lor-a-mussy, what matters how he cam' by his dose o' lead so long as he got it, and no one can't say but sarves him right.'

'And they be after me. They've made up their minds I 'a done it, and I wi'n't be caught and locked up i' Bodmin gaol not if I knaws it; I'll run first. So now give me what I want.'

'And what doest a want?'

'I want a reapin'-hook, and a blanket, and loaf o' bread—that's all.'

'I don't see why you need go,' said Tamsin. '"Tes gran'fer and I hev been most for'ard wi' our words agin' Lawyer Physic, and not you, Esther.'

'Why, if I run, they'll say for sure it be I and not you, and leave you old folks quiet.'

'There's something in that.'

'And second,' said Esther, 'if I didn't do it mysel', why I seed it done, and by a very good friend as I doan't want to hev to send to the gallows, and it's just this, no lies'd do in this case, else I'd

tell them by the scores, and look as simple as any noggy. But they wi'n't do, more's the pity. There's nothin' for't but I must run.'

'There's no hurry,' said the old woman. 'There's no reason to be i' such a tarve. Set you down. You mun eat fust, afore you can run the country, and I've got the taties on the boil now.'

'I don't wish to be ketched here,' said Esther.

'There's no need you should,' answered her grandmother. 'Punch'll mind the door, and bark if anyone comes nigh. Then in the dimmits (twilight) you can go.'

Esther allowed herself to be persuaded. Tamsin proceeded to turn the potatoes into a large earthen bowl; with them were lumps of bacon.

'There, now,' she said, 'don't scald your fingers; help yourselves as you likes.'

'I wonner now,' observed the old man, 'who'll get the Tolmenna property. Lawyer Physic warn't married and had no childer, and I never heard as he had kin.'

'Then us may go back agin to the ou'd place,' said Tamsin. 'That'll be brave. But 't'll be cruel hard work buildin' of her up again.'

'I'd like to know who'd done it,' said the old fellow, shaking his head. 'T'es curious. But I didn't reckon there was any other but myself had the face to do it. And I didn't do it for sure sartain, as I wor sittin' here and singin'. And Esther couldn't a done it, best wishes ain't firearms. If it 'ud been a knack wi' a stone, her was ekal to that, but to shut'n,' he shook his head again, 'her ain't up to them may games.'

Roger leisurely peeled a potato, set it on his knee, and before eating said, 'Why, now, shu'dn't us make it out a case o' phillideecee; then there's no trouble to nobody. Ou'd mother there and I can 'a heerd'n say he was goin' to do it, and were zick o' life, and cruel uneasy in conscience; and you, Esther, can 'a seed'n shut hisself, and there we be—no bother to nobody, and satisfactory to everyone consarned. Ees, I reckon that'll do it. Wheer now, Esther, did he get the gun? Was he out after woodcock? No, that won't come fitty. You sez 'twere done wi' a bullet. Never mind. Gi'e me five minutes, and I'll shape it out—killed hisself, not right in his head, had terrible headaches, and conscience worsen.'

'Hist!' said Tamsin.

The dog was barking outside furiously.

'Quick!' said the old woman, as she flung wet heather on the



fire, 'you throw yourself down in the farran (fern), and I'll cover you up.'

No sooner said than done; Esther had crept behind her grandmother, who at once piled fern, and sticks, and skin-turf<sup>1</sup> over her.

The fire poured forth volumes of pungent white smoke that filled the hovel and rolled forth at the door; so dense was it, that the policeman coming up outside, when he looked in could see nothing; his eyes ran with water, and he coughed as the smoke entered his lungs.

Mrs. Morideg was rocking herself and knitting, droning her song,

There came a knight all clothed in red,  
The red, the green, and the yellow!  
'And will you be my bride?' he said,  
Oh! the flowers that bloom in the valley!

And Roger threw in his part lustily,

The harp, the lute, the fife, the flute and the cymbal.  
Sweet goes the treble violin,  
Oh! the flowers that bloom in the valley!

The old woman continued:

There came a second all clothed in green,  
The red, the green, and the yellow!  
And he said, 'My fair, will you be my queen?'  
Oh! the flowers——

'Come out! come out, you bedlam hag!' shouted the policeman. 'I'm no more a knight all clothed in green than you are a fair maid.'

'Lor-a-mussy!' exclaimed Roger. 'To think now, it's our good friend Mr. Tregaskis. And it's main glad I be to see you. Step in and hev a potato. There be one ready peeled a-coolin' on my knee, and I've a brave bit o' vat bacon atween my fingers. Come now, don't y' be feared that my old 'ooman 'll cast her eye over ye, there be such a pother o' smoke I doubt if that you can see her. Come in, and be hearty welcome now. And if you'll stop, I'll see if I can't find a drop o' sperit to comfort y'.'

'I cannot stay—what a confounded smoke! Where is your daughter Esther?'

'O Lor!' said Mrs. Morideg, 'doan't y' go a rippin' up ou'd

<sup>1</sup> Of turf on the Cornish moors there are two kinds, the peat turf, dug in the bogs, and the skin turf, a spade-graft off the surface of the moor anywhere taken where not stony.

wounds, Mister Tregaskis. Her's in heavenly glory—eighteen year last Curgenven feast.'

Then she broke out into a song sung through the long length and the narrow breadth of Cornwall, and more familiar than 'God save the Queen':

Don't you zee my Billy comin' ?  
Don't you zee him in a cloud ?  
Gardin' angels zingin' round'n,  
Wrapped in a gou'den shroud.

Then Roger roared out the chorus in bass to the shrill pipe of Tamsin's treble:

Billy is the lad I do adore,  
Billy is my darlin'.  
Billy is a-dyin'.  
Oh ! I fear I shall niver zee'n more !

'Always meanin',' threw in Mrs. Morideg, 'my poor daughter Esther as a-died, and be now i' glory ! Praises, oh ! it's groanin' matter, sure. Roger, groan there now, can't y' ?' And both old folks began to groan as at a Revival meeting, and rock themselves as they did so.

'Oh, darn that tatie !' exclaimed Roger. 'Her's trummled off my knee.'

'I do not mean your daughter ; I mean that girl, your grand-child,' said the sergeant, angrily.

'Ah ! now why didn't y' say so, mister ? Come in like a friend and sit down, thickey pertatie be gettin' deadly cold, saving where my knee 'a put a little warmth into her. Dear, dear life ! now I be main sorry the pertatie be so dirty. Her tum'led on the ground, and my ou'd wife—dirty ou'd toad—han't swept'n up fitty this mornin'.'

'Where is the girl ? I cannot come in, I should be stifled. Can't you throw some of the stuff off the fire ?'

'Why, Lor', Mister Tregaskis, us'd set the whole place a-fire if us scattered the trade (stuff) about ; and it ud make such a gashly smoke, ye could eat'n like figgy puddin'.'

'Is Esther Morideg within ?'

'Esther ! Lor', Mister Tregaskis, whatever be you a-thinkin' of ? Her's been gone five or six hours. Her went to Dozmare Pool a flint pickin'.'

'Flint picking ?'

'Aye, so I reckon. Them larned folks to Truro be wun'erful

curious about the flints us picks up—and there's a sight on 'em to be gotten to Dozmare, and her picks up a bit o' money that way, and it's as good a way as yourn nor mine, I spouse.'

'That's false. She has not been to Dozmare. She has been to Tolmenna.'

'Has she though? I'll smack her when her comes home for telling of lies. Her said her was going, but us bain't birds o' the air to fly overhead and see whereabouts her goes. There's one thing I be sure of, her's not runnin' the country after young men, as some maids does I could name.'

'I know nothing about that,' retorted the policeman. 'What I want to know is—that Esther is not here.'

'I've told y' so.'

'Yes, but that does not satisfy me.'

'Well, then, come in and look round for yourself.'

'I can't bear the smoke.'

'There, now, and I couldn't abear to be laced up in them tight clothes as you be; it all comes o' edication. I think nothin' o' the smoke; nor will you if you come in, and sit here and eat the pertaties. In ten minutes you'll be right enough.'

The policeman stepped within, coughing and blinking.

'I'll try to get up a flame,' said Tamsin, throwing on a furze-bush that did indeed blaze up and fill the hovel with light; in the dense smoke, however, little could be distinguished.

'The pertatie be waitin' for y', said Roger. 'Look at'n settin' on my knee and axin' to be eaten.'

'I want none of your potatoes,' replied the policeman, irritated by the smoke. 'I will satisfy myself the girl is not within.'

'Shall I make more blaze, Mister Tregaskis?' asked Tamsin.

'I don't think it helps much. Where is your gun?'

'Here,' answered Roger with alacrity. 'I haven't used 'n for half an age. Smell to his mouth; it be sweet as the breath o' a baby.'

He handed the old gun through the smoke to the policeman, who took it outside, and applied his nose to the barrel, and looked at the lock with watery eyes, then passed it back again. Mrs. Morideg began to knit, rock herself, and sing:

The moon doth shine so bright in the sky,

The red, the green, and the yellow!

'Come out, come out!' did the green knight cry,

Oh! the flowers that bloom in the valley!

And she and old Roger, at the top of their voices, with something of triumph and mockery in the tone, roared the chorus,

The harp, the lute, the fife, the flute, and the cymbal.  
Sweet goes the treble violin——

‘Be silent, will you!’ shouted the policeman, nettled at his want of success, altogether beaten by the fumes of the fire. ‘I’ll tell you what, you howling savage, I’ll tear a hole in the roof, and let this darned smoke out, and then I’ll be able to ransack the whole piggy!’

‘Oh, my dear!’ exclaimed Mrs. Morideg, ‘that’ll never do. What will Farmer Worth say to that up to Trewortha? This bain’t no house o’ our’n; her’s but lent us. He’ll hev the law on you, sure as you’rn a real perliceman, that he will.’

‘Then I’ll come in and grope into every corner. I believe Esther is here.’

‘And what be you a-come after my Esther for?’ asked Tamsin. ‘Is it honourable, and you be courtin’ of her? Why, I always heard say as you was a respectable chap. So if you means it honourable, come along.’

‘It’s nothing of the sort,’ said the policeman. ‘Come, turn out of this house, and let me in; I’ll soon have done with the fire and smoke, and let some daylight into the place.’

‘Not so, mister!’ replied Roger; ‘I’m not to be turned out o’ this house as I was from t’other. Show me your warrant first, I say.’

With this the policeman was not then provided. He had come on at once in quest of Esther, denounced as the murderess by Mrs. Curgenven. He knew enough of the extent of his power, and that he might get into trouble if he went beyond it.

He stood outside for a moment or two, racking his brain to discover what was best to be done, whilst the dog Punch snarled and barked round him, and made a rush at his calves whenever he attempted to enter the hovel. Then ensued a fresh glare within accompanied by a denser outpour of smoke. The old woman had heaped fresh fuel on the fire.

It was not possible for civilised lungs and eyes to endure the fume, and he turned to leave, in ill-humour with himself, and especially with the Moridegs. But he had not taken half a dozen steps from the door before he was rapped on the shoulders by the gun-barrel, and turning sharply, saw Esther, who had sprung through the door and held her grandfather’s fowling-piece.

'Ah! I knew you were there. Now I'll arrest you. I arrest you in the Queen's name on a charge of murder.'

'No—you do not touch me,' said Esther. 'Come a courtin' o' me, is it? Why, Tregaskis, you're the first man as has. And I tell y' what, you mun ketch me afore you can call me your'n. Give me the start, and let us run.'

'In the Queen's name, I arrest you,' said the policeman, stepping towards her.

'Nay! you'll not catch me that road,' said Esther, with a laugh. 'Us'll have rare games, us will. Tip and run. See, Tregaskis!' She brought the muzzle of the barrel down on his shoulder, and then flung the fowling-piece away. 'There, I'm off; tip and run. Ketch me if you can!'

And like a fawn she leaped a bank and went as a fawn bounding over the moor. Tregaskis shook his head. He could not follow, or were he to follow, it would not be with the smallest prospect of catching the girl.

*(To be continued.)*

### FROM CHRISTCHURCH BAY.

GREAT have been the changes in that once quaint region in the North Kent Marshes, opposite the Isle of Sheppey, of which so much has lately been written, a district formerly full of interest and attraction for the wild fowler and the naturalist. Where the famous old coaching house at 'Standbeck'—or rather Sittingbourne—stood, with its gateway guarded on either side by live golden eagles chained to their stands, there is now, I believe, a flourishing drapery store, and instead of the solid and stately Dutch mansions and warehouses of the merchants of a bygone day lining the water sides, cement works, new wharves, and ship-yards have been erected; whilst the silence of other spots, which was once only broken by the cry of the wild fowl and the sound of the rushing tide, has given place to the busy hum of machinery and the noisy clang of hammers.

So far as health goes, the change must be greatly for the better, if one may judge from an old rhyme which runs something to this effect :—

'He who wishes to live very long,  
Should live neither at Sittingbourne, Milton, Teynham, or Tonge;  
If for a little while,  
Let him live at Babchild.'

There are, however, some other picturesque and most restful spots still left in our country, having the same characteristics, if less extensive in their range, where the lover of birds may delight himself on moor and marsh, in marking their comings and their goings, listening to their song, and noting their many varied voices. From his skiff or canoe on some quiet backwater he can observe the waders daintily tripping and feeding about the sandy shores of miniature bays and the margins of shallow pools. Less changed than most localities is that district which lies between the borders of the New Forest and Christchurch Bay, the greater landowners of that region having set their faces against accommodation being provided for those health-seekers from our cities who crowd to the lodging-houses of other adjacent towns and villages. Amusing stories are told locally of the conservatism of some of these estate holders; for instance, one is said not to allow

any evening service to be held in the church that happens to be on his property lest the singing of the congregation should disturb his game. Nor will he allow a dissenting chapel of any sort to be erected there, so it is said, for fear the proceedings, which would probably be altogether too lively and demonstrative, should have a hurtful effect on the slumbers of the feathered creatures in his preserves.

A limited number of visitors, however, will find, as I did, comfortable accommodation on the shores of the backwater.

From a fine old grey pile of buildings, including Christchurch and the Priory, there is a continuous fringe of yellow-plastered, red-tiled houses, and old thatched cottages, which continues for two miles round the Avon Mouth and along the backwater. This ends at Mudford with the pleasant mansion called Gundimore, where Sir Walter Scott, as Mr. Stewart Rose's visitor, spent some months, engaged in writing 'Marmion,' and by way of distraction riding about in the New Forest and exploring barrows. Coleridge also lodged at Mudford during the year 1816.

Not far from the last of the Mudford houses, on the height overlooking the bay, that noted sportsman, the Hon. Grantley Berkeley, had his home; Beacon Lodge it is called. Hither, when unable to follow the pleasures of the chase, and therefore in sore need of distraction, he would summon a prize-fighter of that region, with whom the day was spent in the pastime called playing at fisticuffs. From all local accounts this sportsman was more kindly disposed to animals than to those nearer of kin to himself. Many a tale is told of him by the New Foresters, as well as of his bloodhound Druid, which has been known to run thirty miles in pursuit of a stag, holding it at last. To judge from many of the stories anent his daily life, he must have been what in the New Forest dialect would be termed a 'rammucky' character.

The shooting sheds, where that old father of wild-fowling, Colonel Peter Hawker, kept his punts, are still to be seen at Key Haven, off the mud flats at Lymington, whence they used to come up Christchurch Harbour. Beyond, the white cliffs of the Isle of Wight gleam in the sunlight, and the Needles stand. The derivation of the name of these isolated upright rocks, by the way, is from its old name of Nieder, or Lower Shore. At the Haven Mouth is an ancient and picturesque group of buildings which, judging from their construction, may possibly be of Dutch origin, hailing from the same period as the fine old mansion in the main



street, where Mr. Evans now has his school. This still goes by its old name of Amsterdam House.

Whilst I was at Mudeford, a colony of fishermen, who had for many generations occupied the Haven Mouth buildings, without, I believe, paying any rent for them, were ousted from what had become a somewhat disreputable rookery. The inmates, of both sexes and all ages, slept together side by side in the large old rooms, and led, most of them, a somewhat irregular life, until they got notice to quit, this last summer of 1892. They were sorely tried to find quarters convenient for their avocation, and the wives were wandering hither and thither in most disconsolate fashion. The salmon fishery being then in full swing, the men were all fully occupied in what is their harvest time. Christchurch salmon always holds its own in our market.

What could be more delightful than the walk across the marshes from Stanpit to the Priory, especially on a bright spring morning, when the celandine, larger and brighter than any I have seen elsewhere, gleams under the hedges of the gardens that run down to the marsh, and the cattle, feeding on grassy knolls here and there, in the clear light peculiar to this region at certain times, seem to be of the same breed and condition as those remarkably clean and sleek-coated animals that Sydney Cooper paints. Towards evening, when the sun's rays slant across the marshes and meadows, the cows in Cuypp's pictures will be suggested to one's mind. Then there are the great masses of king-cup, and later on star-like water lilies, yellow iris, and tall flowering reeds with their waving purplish-red plumes.

From the water, with a wide reed-bed in the immediate foreground, out of which young herons rise in startled flight at the approach of our punt, the ancient grey pile of Christchurch is a beautiful object. In front of it is the Priory, an old red building, most picturesque when tenderly touched by the young green of early spring. Behind us is Hengistbury Head, where the Danes first landed, wearing the same appearance now that it did of old. There the birds nest and sing, and rare insects disport themselves, unmolested as they have ever been. On its shore, towards the end of April and early in May, I have watched the newly arrived migrants actively flitting to and fro among the brilliantly flowering gorse and the budding honeysuckle and trailing brambles. Some of the blithe little creatures were already breeding there; the nest of the grey-brown linnet we found snugly placed in the

centre of a great furze-bush, with its dainty little bluish-white speckled eggs, also that of the brightly marked wheatear; but this was cunningly built so far down in an old rabbit-hole that we could not get at the eggs to note their exquisite colouring. Of the wheatear's timidity and gentleness, 'a Son of the Marshes' says, 'The shadow of a crow's wing thrown on the turf as it passes overhead is enough to make him crouch and run for shelter.' The chiffchaff, or least willow-wren, was fluttering about, butterfly-like, hither and thither; his relative, the wood-wren, was there too, but not so much to the fore. He would move on very soon to the forest in which he delights; there, on some wooded slope, he builds his dome-shaped nest of dried grass and moss. From the shape of this and the materials used come the local names, such as oven-birds, or hay-birds, which have been given to the birds of this family.

The redstart flew from tree to tree. One of the prettiest sights I remember is watching a redstart in an orchard on a hillside under the full light of the sun, the trees covered with blossom. When he flashed from one bough to another, the peculiar jerking motion of his tail and its colouring fully justified the bird's rural name of firetail; and indeed the word *start* comes from *steort*, the Anglo-Saxon for tail. The stonechat and the whinchat were both at home among the gorse and short dry grass, uneasily flitting from one low bush to another at the approach of dreaded visitors; and the whitethroats, both large and small, were diving in and out of the tangled bushes, the male chiding and scolding at the intruding footsteps that dared to come into this paradise, which he evidently considered belonged especially to him and his.

As to the family of waders, it is always well represented about Christchurch Bay. Now and again a whimbrel, or May-bird, flew overhead, or we surprised him fishing with his long curved bill for small crustaceans beside a little marsh pool. Later on, during May, June, and July, the whimbrels are more numerous here.

On a shingly waste at the harbour mouth, amongst loose stones and brent, the ringed plover or dotterel was nesting. No fear of a casual observer finding the young of these birds, however. For one thing, their colour too closely resembles their surroundings, and if, by chance, you do approach somewhat near, the mother sounds her alarm note as she rises on the wing, and the wise little creatures, unless they are able to hide so closely amongst the largest stones that even a practised eye would fail to see them,

will quickly bury themselves with a few scrapings of their tiny feet in the loose sand of the shore ; all depends just where they happen to be busily feeding when the parent's alarm is given.

Numbers of dunlins, oxbirds, or sea-snipe, run about, usually feeding in pairs at this season. The nests are very slightly formed among the sea-pinks, or on tussocks of long grass. Pretty little creatures, indeed, are they, tripping nimbly hither and thither, picking up their food of small shell-fish, marine insects, and worms. As the birds mount in flight they are constantly uttering their peculiar note of endearment.

Sanderlings are in little flocks of four to six about the end of April and early in May—the time when I am making these notes of the bird-frequenters of Christchurch Bay, Avon Mouth, and its backwaters. They are putting on their summer dress preparatory to leaving for the North, and what a never-ending source of marvel is the doffing and donning of the varying plumage of many of our birds ! The nuptial dress of some of the males, assumed to charm the opposite sex, is wonderful, with its beautiful markings and vivid colouring. Their ways, generally, suggest a train of thought, of comparison between the habits of the two sexes of birds and of humans that is not altogether favourable to the latter. In the sands and the drifted heaps of seaweed the sanderlings' food is harboured. They are not shy of man, and towards dusk they become most anxious about each other, looking to see that none of their companions have wandered far. Continually uttering a cheeping cry, they pass within a few feet of us, very little alarmed at our presence.

Of the curlews, the largest, and certainly the most wary, frequent these mud-flats as soon as the ebbing tide leaves them uncovered. In the adjoining heath district are their nests, where, early in May, eggs can be found. The curlew sandpiper only visits Christchurch occasionally—in May.

The grey plovers are here, and will be about until the third week in May. Then they take their departure, making the long journey to the Siberian tundras. Just now they are assuming their dark underparts. The grey plover is a larger bird than the golden plover, and its note is pitched in a sharper key.

As to the turnstone—called also in Norfolk the tangle-picker, from its habit of turning over seaweed as well as stones in quest of its living—it may be seen here in almost every month of the year, though Mr. Howard Saunders says that authenticated eggs

of this bird have not been found as yet in any part of the United Kingdom. Those about here are probably non-breeding birds—juveniles. They prefer the shingly beach, their method of searching for food differing from that of their near allies. The knot remains in these parts until the end of May, sometimes till early in June. Then he departs for his northern home in the Arctic regions, whither his progenitors have gone for nesting purposes from time immemorial. Strange it may seem that they should leave the sunny south for the bare and frigid north at that time. But in its brief season insect life abounds there, man disturbeth not, and in peace and quiet the birds can rest and bring out their young.

And, speaking of this immunity from the fear of man, one is reminded of the miserable fate that awaits many a beautiful little egret just when, in its fairest dress, it sits on the nest. One feather firm, we are told, has as many as fifty men employed in the nesting season to secure those feathers that milliners call aigrettes, which are so much worn in women's bonnets. Some will tell you that these are chiefly manufactured from goose-quills. That is true of the cheaper ones, but the aigrette in a lady's bonnet is the crowning beauty of an egret mother. The collector waits till she is on her nest, her little breast full of peace, and the young just hatched, so that the mother will not leave them easily, though alarmed. He ruthlessly seizes her, tears off her crowning plumes and her wings, and then throws her down, gasping, torn, and fluttering, to die beside her little ones, who, deprived of her fostering care, die also miserably. Lately, at a meeting of anti-vivisectionists, it was a curious instance of 'the evil wrought through want of thought' that many of the ladies protesting against the cruelty of vivisection wore these very egret plumes in their bonnets.

In April and early in May you will see here and there a solitary heron, but the older ones are nesting. I saw a number of young ones, in the harbour, fishing in their own solemn fashion. The bright eye of the heron, as its head is bent over the water, literally magnetises its prey. Nearer and nearer to this glittering point comes the fascinated creature; a sudden downward dart of the long bill, and all is over so far as that fish is concerned. The method is imitated by the lark-netter; he cunningly twirls a bit of glass, by means of a contrivance to which a long string is attached, and by which he operates at a little distance. It proves irresistibly attractive to the bird he is desirous of securing.

The spoonbill shows itself only very occasionally about Christchurch Bay, at the vernal migration; 'shoveler' was the old name given to this bird, owing to the shape of its bill, which the spoonbill has a habit of keeping in the water whilst feeding. It visits the harbour more frequently in the autumn. Mr. Hart, the well-known ornithologist, of Christchurch, who knows more about the birds of Hampshire probably than any other man, notes one having appeared there in May of 1891, a very interesting sight, as it walked about in stately fashion, with its snow-white plumage showing in glossy perfection against a dark background. The little bittern is only a casual visitor now, arriving, when it does come, about the end of March.

A few pairs of redshanks remain to breed on the south coast. A wary bird is this, carefully selecting the centre of a grass tuft, or cunningly concealing its nest under rough herbage. This is left long before you reach it, and the bird rises whistling in the air, with many a twist and turn. 'A Son of the Marshes' has dwelt on the cry of alarm which has gained for it the name of 'cussed yelper' from the shore shooters.

To turn to the family of falconidæ that visit Christchurch Bay, the peregrine falcon still nests around the southern coast on its higher cliffs, the eggs being laid in April. The name of peregrine is well applied, for this bird takes a very wide range in quest of prey, often going miles before he will begin to hunt, so as to avert suspicion from the nesting-place. The moors and marshes are visited for food. The hobby is a summer visitor only; the old nests of crows serve his purpose for breeding in. Of the falconidæ this is seen the latest on the wing.

During the autumn and winter the merlin is not at all uncommon. As to the kestrel, or windhover, he is common enough, nesting on Hengistbury Head and in many of the thick clumps of trees around; mice, voles, and beetles satisfy him fully as a rule.

In the month of May the osprey or mullet hawk is rare in this locality, but during the autumn he is seen most years. Higher and higher he passes over the harbour in graceful curves, until some fish attracts his attention. Then, with closed wings, he hurls downwards, seizing his struggling prey, and bears it to some post to devour it, never relaxing his grip until his meal is ended. It is a curious fact that for many years the osprey has always resorted to one particular post on which to eat its food. Lately there has been a danger of this bird disappearing from the harbour. Mr. Hart is always quickly informed when one is seen,

and he has been able, by taking up his position near that post, to prevent others who would not spare this fine bird, and in this way has preserved it more than once; for if he is supposed to be after a specimen, others think it useless to try to secure it.

The kite is now very rare; one in the same collector's museum was shot in Stanpit Marsh, between Mudeford and Christchurch. The last seen hereabouts was during October of 1884. The honey-buzzard, which was formerly a regular visitor to the New Forest for nesting, is now rare; so large a price has been given for the eggs as well as specimens of this bird, that he is seen no longer, although the common buzzard still breeds in many localities.

The whitetailed or sea eagle occasionally comes hither in the late autumn and winter. In the severe winter of 1890-91 a pair might have been seen any day at Avon Mouth. That same season from one hundred to two hundred wild geese, too, were often seen here in broad daylight. Three whitetailed eagles were shot for three successive years by a keeper at Herne Court, on the same day of the year, on the same bough of an old oak tree there. They bred formerly on the high cliffs, near the Needle Rocks, Isle of Wight. This bird's flight is almost noiseless, as he rises in a succession of curves, each curve taking him higher. After pausing a moment with folded wings, he swoops down, passing through the air like a meteor, to strike his talons into his quarry, which he will bear away and devour on some ridge of rocks.

The hen-harrier formerly bred in this district, but it is now almost a bird of the past. Montagu's harrier comes still to the New Forest district to nest, but he is only a spring and summer visitor. He nests always on the ground. A great pleasure it is to the lover of birds to watch its graceful flight, as it skims over the moors and heathland in search of its prey—mice, frogs, and small birds. The sparrowhawk is common enough—too common, in fact, to please the farmers and game preservers.

The artists and naturalists, entomologists and ornithologists, who have hitherto found the New Forest one of the finest hunting-grounds for their purposes in the kingdom, are earnestly hoping that in spite of Sir Redvers Buller's favourable report as to a possible site in its midst of a model range for rifle practice, that idea may not take further shape. Although, as he says, there is little traffic there, as a rule, to be interfered with, yet it would practically close to many students of the interesting and the beautiful a paradise such as is not accessible to them elsewhere.



## ACTORS AND ACTRESSES IN WESTMINSTER ABBEY.

WITHIN the walls or beneath the shadow of Westminster Abbey are to be found the graves or monuments of most of the lights of the English stage in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The splendid company of dramatists and authors, with whose names the Elizabethan era is connected, had all passed away; Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher lay in their several graves (two of these are in the Abbey), while the old theatres were deserted and empty. With the restoration of Charles II. the legitimate drama came again into favour, and the actors returned to the stage. Thenceforward the drama has flourished, and each succeeding generation has seen fresh stars rise and set in the theatrical world.

It is only with the Restoration drama that the annals of *actresses* on the English stage begin. Queen Henrietta Maria, wife of Charles I., had early made a vain attempt to introduce the French fashion of female players into her adopted country by the establishment of a French company, composed only of women, in London; but the experiment was premature, and the foreigners were hissed and pelted off the stage at their first performance. Until 1660 the female parts had always been taken by boys, and the custom survived even after women had taken their place upon the stage, since some of the more famous of the boy-actors (grown into men) continued occasionally to play their favourite *rôles* as late as the end of the seventeenth century. Kynaston, the chief boy-actor, survived till 1699, long after the ladies had ousted him from the principal parts, and in 1661 Pepys, who saw him in the 'Silent Woman,' speaks of him as 'the liveliest lady for a boy' he had ever seen. Nokes won fame as the nurse in 'Romeo and Juliet,' while the 'boy' who played Evadne was beautiful even in old age. It is now ascertained beyond doubt that women first appeared upon the stage between November 1660 and January 1661; on January 3 Pepys, that inveterate playgoer, tells us that he saw the 'Beggar's Bush,' 'it being well done, and here the first time that ever I saw women come upon the stage.'



One of the first actresses was Mrs. Saunderson,<sup>1</sup> who married the great tragedian, Thomas Betterton. Both Betterton and his wife bore from the beginning to the end of their long theatrical career an honoured name, and attained the chief places in their company. Betterton may be justly called a child of Westminster, where he was born, bred, and buried. He was the son of one of Charles I.'s under-cooks, who is described as a gentleman, and lived with other wealthy people in Tothill Street. He was trained under Rhodes, who formed a small company of actors early in 1660, but ultimately joined Davenant and the Duke's Company. Pepys speaks of his performance of the 'Bondman' as 'above all that ever I saw.' Betterton's first real triumph was on December 28, 1661, in the part of Hamlet, which he acted to the Ophelia of the lovely Bess Saunderson, with whom he was already deeply in love, a love that was to last unsullied by jealousy for the rest of their lives. Even the turbulent audience of that day was hushed into unwonted stillness from the moment when Hamlet spoke the famous words: 'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother,' the enthusiasm culminating in the ghost scene when the actor's face turned suddenly as white as his neckcloth, and Mr. Pepys, vainly hushed by his next neighbour, could not forbear crying out, 'It is the best part ever done by a man.' It is said that Betterton's reading of Hamlet had been handed down to him through Davenant from the days of Shakespeare himself, and was the traditional way of playing the part. Ugly and gouty, 'with a great head, short thick neck, stooped in the shoulders, fat short arms, rarely lifted above his stomach, his left hand frequently lodged in his breast between his coat and waistcoat, while with his right he prepared his speech, his actions few but just,' Pope acknowledged him at the end of his career to be the best actor he had ever seen, and at seventy in 'Hamlet' he still, by voice, look, and gesture, appeared a young man. For fifty years, during which he created 130 new parts, no actor surpassed him in the public favour, and he was looked up to as an authority by all.

Bess Saunderson, who became Mrs. Betterton in December 1662, was not only a first-rate actress but a good woman and devoted wife, a combination only too rare in those days. She played the leading female parts in the Duke's Company for thirty years with signal success, and was especially renowned in Shakespeare's heroines; at

<sup>1</sup> Unmarried ladies were then called Mrs., a contraction of Mistress.

last (in 1695) increasing age and failing health obliged her to give up her parts to her husband's ward, Mrs. Barry. The closing scene of Betterton's appearance is most touching. While his aged wife sat trembling with apprehension at home, the venerable actor staggered on to the stage in the old Haymarket theatre for his benefit, April 15, 1710, crippled with gout and one foot in a slipper, as the fiery Melanthius in Beaumont and Fletcher's 'Maid's Tragedy.' The audience was a splendid one; even the stage was packed with great people, while the card-players actually left their games and came with cards in their hands to encourage their old favourite, the curtain descending amidst thundering plaudits. Betterton left his last triumph for his death-bed; he died (April 28), barely two weeks later, in his wife's arms.

It has been erroneously stated that Mrs. Barry, Betterton's ward, the greatest tragic actress of her generation, lies also in the Cloisters, the fact being that she is buried at Acton. When a small child of about six the charming Mistress Bracegirdle first made her *début* as a page in the same company as Mrs. Barry, and it was owing to the latter's encouragement that she took to the stage as a profession. She also was either adopted by Betterton or placed under his care, and, though inferior to Elizabeth Barry in talent, captivated every heart by her charming manners and appearance.

Her first important appearance was in a play of Congreve's, and it was in his comedies, written expressly for her, that she achieved her greatest triumphs, acting also, however, comedy and tragedy in Dryden's plays, and such adaptations of Shakespeare as were then customary, with almost equal success. 'It will be no extravagant thing to say that scarce an audience saw her that were less than half of them lovers, without a suspected favourite amongst them.' Congreve and Rowe seemed, in the plays they wrote for her, 'palpably to plead their own passion, and made their private court to her in fictitious characters.' If she favoured any one of her many suitors, Congreve was the lucky man; but, in spite of his own ill fame, Elizabeth Bracegirdle seems to have kept her fair reputation.

Mrs. Bracegirdle's career on the stage was comparatively short. In 1706-7 the star of Ann Oldfield was rising, and in a trial of strength between the two actresses, when each acted the same part on consecutive nights, the town gave the preference to the younger lady, whereupon Mrs. Bracegirdle retired in dudgeon,

rather than suffer herself to be eclipsed by her rival. Once only did she appear on the stage again, to take part with Mrs. Barry in Betterton's first benefit. She lived long enough to see the *début* of the great Garrick, and to banter old Colley Cibber on his jealousy of the young actor. So benevolent was she to the poor, especially in Clare Market near her residence, that 'she could not pass that neighbourhood without thankful acclamations from people of all degrees, so that if anyone affronted her they would have been in danger of being killed immediately.' She died in 1748, having outlived her own generation, and was buried beside her old friends the Bettertons in the East Cloister.

Ann Oldfield, the only actress buried actually inside the Abbey walls, was, while superior to Mrs. Bracegirdle on the stage, far below her in personal character. Ann was the daughter of an officer in the king's army, and, being left fatherless, was apprenticed by her mother to a seamstress in King Street, Westminster; they lived with an aunt, who kept a tavern in St. James's. Here the playwright, Captain Vanburgh, heard her recite a play one night behind the bar to her relatives and some guests, and was much struck by her talents as well as by her personal attractions. Through his encouragement the great manager, Rich, took up the humble seamstress and launched her upon a brilliant theatrical career. In those days the stage training was most severe, and perhaps for that very reason we read of one ignorant untaught girl after another turning out a finished mistress in her art. Ann at first received 15s. a week merely to appear as a mute, *i.e.* a walking lady or supernumerary on the stage. In 1700, aged fifteen, she was first allowed to take a minor part, and it is expressly recorded that she was then unable to modulate that 'silver voice' which afterwards proved her chief attraction. After three or four years' more probation she played at Bath before Queen Anne, and here the critic Colley Cibber first appreciated her powers. He unearthed an old play, 'The Careless Husband,' which he had written long before and put away in despair of ever finding an actress capable of the chief female part, Lady Betty Modish, and remodelled his heroine upon the young girl's character, even making use of many of Ann's own remarks. The play proved a great success, which Cibber generously attributed to Ann Oldfield's rendering of the part. She took Mrs. Bracegirdle's place, as has been said before, in 1706, and became the acknowledged queen of comedy, which she at first vastly preferred to tragedy, saying that she hated

having a page drag her train behind her. But in spite of this acknowledged distaste for tragedy she is said to have been inimitable in certain tragic parts, and was the original Jane Shore (1714), and the Marcia in Addison's 'Cato,' playing to Booth's famous impersonation of the hero (1713), and there is little doubt that in these parts she roused her audiences to enthusiasm. Her private character does not bear close investigation, yet such was the standard of morality at the time that she was received on intimate terms in the best society, and even at court. She died in 1730 at her house in Lower Grosvenor Street, nursed to the last by her friend, an ex-actress, Mrs. Saunders, the Betty of Pope's somewhat spiteful lines :

'Odious, in woollen 'twould a saint provoke,  
(Were the last words that poor Narcissa spoke,)  
No; let a charming chintz and Brussels lace  
Wrap my cold limbs and shade my lifeless face.  
One would not, sure, be frightful when one's dead—  
And, Betty, give this cheek a little red.'

The fact is that Mrs. Oldfield piqued herself on her taste in dress, and thus attired she was laid in state in the Jerusalem Chamber. There were the usual prayers and a funeral sermon, in which Dr. Parker, the preacher, made the somewhat equivocal remark that he buried the actress 'very willingly and with much satisfaction.' Strange as it seems nowadays, the burial of a notorious actress in the Abbey roused no opposition from anybody, the Dean and Chapter granting an easily won consent. But when General Churchill desired to place a monument there to the lady's memory, Wilcocks, the Dean, who was a Canon at the time of the unopposed burial, rebelled and refused to allow it. Before the space for burials became scarce and precious as nowadays, many persons were buried in the Abbey merely because they died in the precincts, or because their relations were willing to pay the heavy fees demanded, and this latter fact explains how it was that Mrs. Oldfield lies amidst the famous dead.

Barton Booth, who played with Ann Oldfield, was originally destined for the Church, but he ran away from home at the age of seventeen (1698), and went on the stage in the Dublin Theatre. After making a great sensation by his acting of the ghost to Betterton's Hamlet, he ultimately became the acknowledged successor of the old tragedian in popular favour, winning success not only by his talents, but by his rare personal beauty and the peculiar harmony of his voice. He is now chiefly identified with

the part of Cato, not only because his acting, coupled with Mrs. Oldfield's, won a fleeting popularity for the piece, but on account of the political allusions with which Addison had filled the play, Whigs and Tories applauding every allusion to liberty with equal vehemence. Drury Lane was crowded for thirty-five nights—an unprecedented run in those days—with ardent politicians; and at Oxford, where the company afterwards acted, crowds besieged the doors, and every corner was filled before one o'clock. Henry VIII. and King Lear were parts in which Booth also won success, but there seems little doubt that, while surpassing Betterton in appearance and voice, his acting was not equal to that of the older player whom he avowedly imitated. His health gave way early, he retired from the stage at the age of 46, and died shortly after, his end hastened by quack medicines and the violent medical treatment—bleeding, plasters, and blisters—so common in his time.

Nearly forty years (1772) after his death a monument was placed to his memory in Poets' Corner by his second wife, *née* Saintlow, once a celebrated actress herself. Booth was closely connected with Westminster—in life, because he was educated at Westminster School under the great disciplinarian, Dr. Busby; in death, from his monument, and also because two streets (Barton Street and Cowley Street) record his memory. With America too Booth is doubly associated. His family emigrated to the new world, and two of his descendants, both actors, are known to fame. One, Wilkes Booth, assassinated President Lincoln in Ford's Theatre, Washington; the other is the well-known actor, a familiar figure in Shakespearian parts on both sides of the water.

Mrs. Cibber, so long associated on the same stage with Garrick, and so like him in appearance that they might have been brother and sister, was a younger sister of the musical composer, Dr. Arne. She had considerable musical talent herself and a fine voice; her *début* was made at the Opera, and she was a great favourite with Handel, who wrote the contralto songs in the 'Messiah' and the part of Micah in 'Sampson' on purpose for her. Unfortunately for her happiness she married the ugly and disreputable son of old Colley Cibber, the well-known manager and actor. Her married life was bitterness, and finally her husband drove her to elope. The actor Richard Cumberland (who lies in Poets' Corner) saw her in her early days as the heroine in the 'Fair Penitent,' and describes her voice as 'sweet withal,' only so wanting in contrast that it wearied the ear, like 'a long old

legendary ballad of innumerable stanzas, every one of which is sung to the same tune.' This, however, was before Garrick's reforms, and later critics have only words of praise for Mrs. Cibber. Mrs. Betterton was eclipsed and forgotten in the new Ophelia of Mrs. Cibber, the best, it is said, either before or since; 'no eloquence could paint her distracted look, her fine acting in the mad scene.' Curiously enough Garrick did not believe in her capability to play what was afterwards her most celebrated part, Constance in 'King John,' but, encouraged by Quin's remark, 'Don't tell me, Mr. Garrick; that woman has a heart and can do anything where passion is required,' he allowed his judgment to be overruled, and was captivated and astonished by her powers. When going off the stage after hearing of Arthur's capture 'she uttered the words "O Lord, my boy!" with such a scream of agony as will never be forgotten by those who heard her.' In 1749 Mrs. Cibber quarrelled with Garrick and left his company, but five years afterwards a reconciliation was effected, and she did not leave him during the remainder of her theatrical career; each felt the want of the other's assistance on the stage. Mrs. Cibber's health was wretchedly bad, and, as with Booth, the doctors' treatment hastened her end. When in her last illness the king (not knowing her state of health) ordered a performance of the 'Provoked Wife,' one of her great parts, Mrs. Cibber insisted on dragging herself upon the stage to act the fashionable Lady Betty. She was carried from the theatre to her house in Scotland Yard and never left her bed again, dying in January 1766, aged 52. She was privately buried, like so many of her friends and contemporaries, in the Cloisters (North Cloister).

Two years later there died at Bath an actress, Mrs. Pritchard, considered by some critics as a finer actress than Mrs. Cibber. She is chiefly remembered now as Mrs. Siddons's greatest forerunner in the part of Lady Macbeth, though in her own day she won the most brilliant successes in comedy. As the wife of an obscure strolling actor she began her theatrical career in the booths at London and country fairs; but she was ultimately engaged at the Haymarket, and had attained a leading position on the stage ten years before Garrick's star had risen. The great actor respected though he never really liked her, and was wont to complain that in tragedy she would 'blubber her grief.' So uneducated was Mrs. Pritchard that she is said never to have read the play of 'Macbeth,' even her own part being read aloud to her



by the prompter. Whatever the truth of this, her success as Lady Macbeth was indisputable, and long after her death the critics disagreed as to whether her rendering of certain parts, especially in the banquet scene, had not surpassed the incomparable Siddons. Dr. Johnson, who called her 'an inspired idiot,' made the severe observation that only on the stage had she 'gentility and understanding,' but since the fastidious Horace Walpole, to whom she was a near neighbour, used to invite her constantly to Strawberry Hill and specially praised her behaviour in society, the old doctor was evidently too sweeping in his judgments. Horace's only remark in her disfavour is that he could not restrain his laughter at her complaints of starvation in the part of Jane Shore, which, as she was so fat that she could scarcely move across the stage, tickled his fancy. She took leave of the stage in her greatest part, with Garrick as Macbeth, April 24, 1768, and delivered a poetical farewell written for her by the versatile David. She lived till the following August, and, though not buried in the Abbey, a monument was put up to her in Poets' Corner by her admirers, the inscription written by the poet laureate, John Whitehead.

Two actors, each celebrated in different ways, died in the same year (1777), and were both buried in the North Cloister. No greater contrast could have been found than the tragedian Barry and the comedian Foote, whose wit was so captivating that even the serious Johnson was obliged to lay down his knife and fork and forego his dinner to laugh. 'The dog was so very comical—no, sir, he was irresistible.' By his cruel wit Foote won many enemies, and died of a broken heart caused by the revenge of one noble dame whom he had held up to public censure. He died October 21, 1777, on his way to seek health abroad, and was buried by torchlight at Westminster. Spranger Barry was Garrick's most famous and successful rival. Like Booth he first appeared on the stage at Dublin, where he was born in 1719. On October 4, 1746, he made his *début* in London, at Drury Lane, as Othello, and crowds rushed to see the new actor. In one part only, that of Romeo, there is little doubt that Barry surpassed his greater rival, but he challenged comparison in several other Shakespearian characters, especially in King Lear, at Covent Garden Theatre, where he acted with Mrs. Cibber, while Garrick played at Drury Lane.

Barry had many advantages, not only in his fine figure and beautiful face and voice, but he was also very well connected, and intimate with the greatest people, supping one night with the



Prime Minister, another with some leader of fashion; he won the name of Mark Anthony for his magnificent style of living. His triumph, however, was short. A venture as manager of the Dublin theatre failed; he became a martyr to gout early, losing his looks, figure, and fortune, and at last, in 1768, was glad to accept an engagement in company with his wife, the actress 'Ann Crawford,' at Drury Lane from his former rival. Garrick behaved most generously to his fallen foe. He gave the couple a salary of 1,500*l.*, and when Barry's health quite gave way added 200*l.*, with a free choice of parts, and liberty to appear only when he felt able. Yet all was of little avail. The hand of death was now on Barry, and it is sad to read of one who had fascinated all hearts as Romeo in his youth, appearing old and infirm at fifty, as Othello 'in a full suit of gold-laced scarlet, a small cocked hat, knee-breeches and silk stockings conspicuously displaying a pair of gouty legs,' and playing to the Desdemona of his lovely wife. In 1774 he returned again to Covent Garden. He died three years later, and was privately buried in the Cloisters. After twenty-five years had passed, his grave was again opened to receive the coffin of his wife.

Mrs. Spranger Barry, the daughter of a rich apothecary at Bath, took to acting to console herself for a disappointment in love, and married an inferior actor, one Dancer, who died young. Ann's first recorded appearance was on November 8, 1758; she played Cordelia to Barry's Lear, but her acting made no special impression that day, and it was only after nine years' careful training from Barry himself that she took her place in the foremost rank of the theatrical profession. With the fascinating silver-tongued actor the young *débutante* fell passionately in love, and married him after the death of Dancer. The exact date is uncertain, but her name does not appear as Mrs. Barry on the playbills till she acted with her husband at Drury Lane. She first appeared in London at Foote's theatre, the Haymarket. Garrick witnessed her *début* there and much applauded her. The following year, 1678, he engaged both husband and wife at Drury Lane, and here Ann's reputation reached its greatest height. She was for long the acknowledged queen of comedy, and rivalled Mrs. Cibber and Mrs. Woffington in tragic parts; while, like Ann Oldfield preferring comedy, she used to say she only acted tragedy 'to please the town.' When she was nearly forty a spectator wrote of her Cordelia, 'It is the grandest

thing of the kind I have ever seen an actress do. My fancy still feeds upon it, and the recollection will go with me to my grave.' During her whole life she is said to have had no worthy competitor in her part of Desdemona, and in Lady Randolph, her greatest *role*, in which she appeared on the stage for the last time in her farewell performance (about 1798), she is said to have even excelled Mrs. Siddons.

Though Ann Crawford was now old, coarse, and ugly, Mrs. Siddons feared her rivalry and was not ashamed to own it, but when the aged actress was foolish enough to challenge comparison with her younger rival's famous part of 'Isabella' for her benefit, no seats were taken, and she fell seriously ill with annoyance. Throughout her life she was subjected to various changes of fortune; a small weekly pension bequeathed her by her mother on condition that she left the stage was paid by a relative, who refused to accept the forfeit. Barry left her all he had to leave, and she amassed a good fortune by her own exertions, but was foolish enough to marry a third husband, a Mr. Crawford, described by some authorities as a scampish barrister, by others as a bad actor; all agree that he was much younger than herself, and proved an unprofitable husband, who spent her money and broke her heart. She died in Queen Street, Westminster, November 29, 1801, and was buried close by in the Abbey Cloisters.

Of Garrick it is impossible here to speak at length. He was a pupil of Dr. Johnson's, at Edial, near Lichfield, and travelled up to London in company with his master at the age of twenty in order to start a wine business. But wine was soon deserted for the stage, and four years later, on October 19, 1741, Garrick, announced as a 'gentleman who had never appeared on any stage' (which was not strictly accurate), took the town by storm in his famous impersonation of Richard III. Henceforth Garrick's success was assured, and for thirty-eight years he held the foremost place on the English stage. To him we owe much; no more was Shakespeare's fame insulted by plays which bore no resemblance to the original text; no more did the traditional sing-song described by Cumberland offend the ear; but while these and other improvements were made by the actor-manager at Drury Lane, one innovation found no favour in his eyes. I allude to the attempt made by Macklin, at Covent Garden, to introduce costumes contemporary with the period of the play, instead of the usual practice of wearing modern dress for every epoch. Macklin, instead of

wearing, like Garrick, the uniform of a military officer in the eighteenth century as Macbeth, tried the experiment of dressing himself and the other characters in Scotch kilts, but the attempt failed, and on his third appearance he was hissed off the stage (October 1773). John Henderson (who was buried 1785 in Poets' Corner) is said to have been the first to successfully wear Scottish costume as Macbeth. Garrick won his noblest fame in tragic parts, especially in Shakespearian characters, but so versatile was his talent that he rivalled Quin in Falstaff, and brought down the house when he played sentimental comedy or rolled about the stage as the drunken Sir John Brute. The romance of Garrick's life will be found in his marriage, and, as with Betterton, no shadow of ill fame darkened his domestic happiness. The well-known play of *David Garrick*, in which Sotheran in past years and now Charles Wyndham in his turn delight audiences, is supposed to be founded on an incident of Garrick's life. Eva Maria Violette, a young dancer who was brought to England under the protection of the Countess of Burlington and taken up by other great ladies, was for three seasons all the rage in London. She and Garrick fell deeply in love with each other, but it is said that Lady Burlington, jealous for the career of her young favourite, entreated Garrick to suppress his own passion and cure the lady of hers. On this is founded the incident of the play when Garrick feigns drunkenness in order to disgust his lady-love, but as a fact the actor seems not to have taken the Countess's hint—rather loved and won the beautiful dancer for his bride.

Garrick's farewell appearance was on June 10, 1776, as Don Felix, the hero in a forgotten comedy called 'The Wonder,' and he was so affected that he omitted the usual country dance at the end of the piece, and, instead of one of his favourite and somewhat bombastic epilogues, could only utter a few sentences when he appeared before the curtain amidst the sobs of the spectators. The night before he had taken leave of the stage in tragedy as Lear to Miss Younge's Cordelia, and parted from his companions in the green room with a solemn 'May God bless you all.' Scarcely three years were to pass before he took his leave of life, dying on January 20, 1779, in retirement, at Adelphi Terrace, Strand. Never had such signal honours been paid to an actor before; even the popular Betterton had been buried obscurely by candlelight. Now, from the Strand to the Abbey, a string of carriages blocked the way; a guard of soldiers had to keep back the dense crowds; at

the great west door, which was thrown open to receive the procession, stood John Thomas, Dean of Westminster and Bishop of Rochester, in his episcopal robes as if some royal *cortège* were approaching. Peers carried the pall; the coffin was followed by the whole Literary Club, old Samuel Johnson standing bathed in tears by the open grave at the foot of Shakespeare's monument; beside him Sir Joshua Reynolds, Burke and Gibbon; around them were the players from Covent Garden and Drury Lane. Five years later Garrick's widow was again to be seen here when the coffin of her husband's old master, Johnson, was laid close to the spot where he himself had stood at Garrick's funeral. Forty-three years were to pass after the actor's death before Mrs. Garrick, aged ninety-eight, was laid in her husband's grave. Those who knew her in her old age describe the once beautiful dancer as 'a little bowed-down old woman, who went about leaning on a gold-headed cane, dressed in deep mourning, and always talking of her dear Davy.' Upon the monument to Garrick at Lichfield is inscribed Johnson's characteristic remark: 'I am disappointed by that stroke of death, which has eclipsed the gaiety of nations and impoverished the public stock of harmless pleasure.' Here, beneath the statue in Poets' Corner, is an inscription by Pratt (substituted for one prepared by Burke), justly condemned by Charles Lamb as 'a farrago of false thoughts and nonsense.'

Mrs. Siddons and her brother John Kemble are links between the old generation of players and the modern; for five generations some members of the Kemble family were attached to the theatrical profession, beginning with the grandfather of Sarah and John, who acted under Betterton and Booth, and continuing to our own day in Fanny Kemble, whose *début* Mrs. Siddons actually witnessed. Sarah Siddons's parents were strolling players, and all their children were put on the stage as soon as they could walk. Sarah, when a toddling baby, was brought forward as an infant prodigy at her mother's benefit, but the audience were not properly impressed, and only laughed and made noises, till Mrs. Kemble came forward and reproved them by reciting the fable of the boys and the frog. At thirteen the child was playing Ariel in a barn at Worcester, and four years later we find her sustaining the principal female parts at Wolverhampton. Her *début* as Portia on December 29, 1775, proved a failure; her dress was old and shabby, her voice weak with nervousness, and, in fact, during her first engagement at Drury Lane she excited little interest. She had the honour of acting twice

with Garrick, the second time as Anne to his Richard III. five nights before he left the stage. Garrick did not appreciate the latent powers in the nervous girl of twenty-three, and though he was generous enough to recommend her to Sheridan after his retirement from the management, and always behaved to her with great courtesy, she bore a grudge against him all her life. Sheridan shared Garrick's opinion and rejected her, so she was driven to go into the provinces again, and acted at Bath with Garrick's successor, John Henderson, achieving some success; here she perfected herself in her art, and prepared for another appearance in London. Six years later she made the first of her long succession of triumphs at Drury Lane in Sothorne's tragedy of 'Isabella, or the Fatal Marriage,' her father and husband both tremblingly awaiting the result. So lifelike was her acting of the dying scene that night that her little boy of eight, who acted Isabella's son, and must often have seen his mother do the part, burst into real tears, and never had such shouts of acclamation been heard since the days of Garrick. Henceforth each new part created a veritable *furor*, and with Reynolds's magnificent picture of the Tragic Muse to give us a faint idea of her noble presence, it is not difficult to credit the rapturous enthusiasm she aroused. In Lady Macbeth she achieved her greatest triumph, and with this part her name is connected for all succeeding generations. She played the part for the first time on February 2, 1784, and caused Sheridan much anguish as she deviated from Mrs. Pritchard's reading of the part in the sleep-walking scene by putting down the candle, which the older actress had carried all the time, and going through the pantomime of washing her hands. So great was the conservatism of the stage that the manager expected an uproar from Mrs. Pritchard's old admirers, but to his delight and surprise the audience were too spell-bound by Mrs. Siddons's acting to notice the innovation. Her provincial tours were equally triumphant; only once did she meet with successful rivalry, when in Dublin the Irish rallied round their old favourite, Ann Crawford. Edinburgh went mad over her. Her theatrical career was appropriately begun and ended as one of Shakespeare's heroines, her real farewell of the stage being taken in June 1812 as Lady Macbeth, though she appeared once or twice afterwards at family benefits; for the last time as Lady Randolph, in June 1819, at the benefit of Charles Kemble. In her old age she became so stout and unwieldy that, when kneeling in a part, she had to be helped to rise. Yet Washington Irving, who did not

see her till she was old, says she penetrated in a moment to his heart, froze and melted it by turns, and that he hardly breathed while she was on the stage. Her effect on her fellow-actors was also extraordinary; as Queen Catherine on one occasion, her fiery glance at the surveyor drove the unfortunate man who acted the part off the stage, vowing that he would not encounter that awful look again for the world. In Rowe's 'Tamurlane' she once worked herself up to such a pitch of agony at the sight of her strangled lover that she fell apparently lifeless before the murderer, and the audience clamoured for the curtain, believing her dead. Behind the scenes and in private life her haughty manner, her parsimony, and insolence made her many enemies; and once in Dublin the audience, having heard exaggerated reports of her uncharitableness and meanness, actually hissed her off the stage, when she fell fainting into her brother John's arms. She was much lionised by the fashionable world, and gave readings at private houses and at the Palace; nearly all day carriages would be drawn up outside her lodgings, and, in spite of her incivility to her visitors, her receptions were thronged by rank and fashion, even the Iron Duke of Wellington uncomplainingly enduring the rudeness of the haughty actress. She died June 8, 1831, eight years after her elder brother John, and the statues of brother and sister stand together in the little Chapel of St. Andrew. John is represented as Cato, and his statue, designed by Flaxman and executed by Hinchcliffe, stood till 1865 in the North Transept, where it was appropriately placed by the sister to whom he owed so much. Through her influence he first appeared in London, in 1783, as Hamlet, and, though cold and somewhat unsympathetic, had for long no rival except Henderson in tragedy. He once, and once only, played Macbeth to his sister's famous Lady Macbeth. He became manager of Covent Garden in 1803, and revived Shakespearian plays at that theatre. Wolsey, Lear, Brutus, and Coriolanus were amongst his best parts. Sarah Siddons's statue by Chantrey was suggested by the great picture of the Tragic Muse. Macready paid for it, and Lord Lansdowne and the poet Rogers composed the inscription. With Mrs. Siddons, the last of the great tragic actresses of the eighteenth century, the muster-roll of theatrical names connected with Westminster Abbey may fitly close.



## *A FIRST NIGHT.*

### I.

‘What does Shepherd say?’

‘Well, he doesn’t say, right out, so much as he implies.’ I opened Shepherd’s letter, and glanced through it again. ‘It is easy to see that he thinks Ruthven is in a bad way.’

‘Then I shall at once get some one to take his part.’

‘He says that the mere thought of such a thing would be sufficient to send Ruthven headlong into his grave.’

Trotter became excited.

‘Then do you mean to tell me that I’ve only a choice between murder and suicide?’

‘Shepherd puts it that Ruthven has been waiting and working all his life for such a chance, and that if now he only gets it to lose it the man will break his heart and die.’

Trotter threw himself into a chair.

‘Ince, you’ll drive me mad! I consider that I’ve been badly used all through. When, at your special request, I offered the part to Ruthven——’

‘There is no man upon the English stage who could act it like him.’

‘Did I say there was? Good heavens, man, let me speak! When I offered the part to Ruthven, and he accepted it, there was not a word said about his being unwell. A few days afterwards, when the reading is called, he writes and says he is a little off colour, but that if I will send him his part he will show at first rehearsal. I send him his part. First rehearsal comes, and still no Ruthven! Second rehearsal, and still no Ruthven! Third rehearsal, and still no Ruthven! Until we have drifted where we are! Then you ask Shepherd to go and see the man, who has stuck himself in some remote hole in some remote corner of Scotland—as if he had done it on purpose!—and tell us what prospect there is of his putting in an appearance. Shepherd writes that there is little or none. Then you say that if I take the part away from him I shall send the man headlong to his grave.’

‘That’s what Shepherd says, not I.’



'Then I say, Shepherd be hanged! I have never met the man in my life. I have never seen him act. I know nothing about him.'

'But I have seen him act, and I know something about him, and I tell you that in a part of this particular kind he would prove that he possesses something very much like genius.'

'What has that to do with it, if the man's too ill to act? You don't propose, I presume, that he should come on to the stage the first night without having attended rehearsal at all?'

What Trotter said was true enough. And I was quite as anxious for the success of the play as he could be. 'As he put it—

'Anybody would think I was the only person concerned. It's your play, not mine!'

'My dear Trotter, don't hit me.'

'I should like to—or somebody. I don't know how long you mean to keep the stage waiting for rehearsal. I'm going! And after rehearsal I intend to get somebody to take his place.'

It *was* annoying. In writing the play, throughout it I had had Ruthven in my mind's eye. The part of Blaise Townshend was, in no slight degree, the play. As Blaise Townshend I had felt convinced Ruthven would score a success which would make 'A Story of To-day' the most successful drama I had given to the public. And now it appeared that the man was so ill that, unless we postponed the production of the piece—which neither Trotter nor I was disposed to do—the part would have to be given to some man who, in all probability, would be no more *my* Blaise Townshend than I myself should be.

When we reached the theatre, and were hurrying through the passages which lead from the stage-door to the stage, some one who was standing there touched Trotter on the arm, and stopped him.

'Excuse me—Mr. Trotter, I believe? I am Mr. Ruthven.'

'Mr. Ruthven!'

In his surprise Trotter started back and almost trod upon my toes. Here was the man standing at our elbows whom we had supposed to be lying on a bed of sickness four hundred miles away. My personal acquaintance with him had been but slight. I had seen him act in a provincial town, and had been so struck by his performance that I had gone behind between the acts and obtained an introduction. During the three or four days I

remained in the town I had met him twice or thrice again. As he stood in the uncertain light, holding his hat in his hand, his eyes fixed wistfully on Trotter's countenance, I could not but be struck by the change in his appearance. He appeared to have shrunk to nothing. He even seemed to have lost in height. His slight, fragile figure had so decreased that one felt that if it decreased much more it would reach a vanishing-point. His face was worn, and wan, and white. Trotter stared at him in bewildered amazement—so, indeed, did I.

'I may truly say, Mr. Ruthven, that this is an unexpected pleasure. I was under the impression that you were ill in bed.'

Mr. Ruthven put his hand up to his brow.

'I—I haven't been quite well.'

Trotter turned to me.

'You know Mr. Ince?'

'I ought to.'

But he did not seem as though he did. He looked at me with expressionless eyes, as though I were an entire stranger. I held out my hand to him.

'Surely, Mr. Ruthven, you have not forgotten me? I give you my word that I have not forgotten you. I would sooner see you than—anything.'

He smiled—or rather I should write that he attempted to smile, because the attempt was a failure. Trotter slipped his arm through his.

'Mr. Ruthven, we are already late for rehearsal. May I ask if you have looked at your part?'

'I am letter perfect.'

He was. He went through his lines, cues and all, without a hitch. But with what an air! With the air of a man whose thoughts were far away—of a man who took not the slightest interest in his surroundings. He certainly did not appear to be an actor who acted at rehearsals. Trotter came to me while he was going through one of his scenes.

'What do you think of him?' he asked.

'I think he's ill.'

'So do I. I'm not sure that it isn't my duty to order him straight off home to bed.'

Shortly after Ruthven joined us. Trotter made to him some half-jesting remark of the kind. He looked up at Trotter with

an air of curious hesitation. As he spoke he rubbed his hands slowly one against the other.

'Why do you think I am ill? Because I don't act? I never do until I have got my business, and sometimes not even then until the night. But'—he turned to me—'I like the part. I think I understand it. I shall make something of it. I know I shall. I ought to. It is now or never.' He repeated the last word—'never!'

'Why do you say that?'

He stretched out his hands in front of him, with a little appealing gesture. 'Ah—why?'

That afternoon I met Maidment of the *Evening Journal*. He fell in at my side. We walked together down the Strand.

'Sad news this about Ruthven.'

I looked at him.

'To what news are you referring?'

'I hear he is at death's door.'

'Where did you hear that?'

'The fellows were talking about it at the club. They talk about getting him something from the Fund. It appears that he is actually in want. Seems hard lines just when he was going to get his chance. By the way, whom are you going to put in his place?'

'I don't know if you are aware that Mr. Ruthven is at this moment in town?'

'In town! Why, I just heard Farncombe saying that only the day before yesterday he left Ruthven dying at Pittenweem. It seems that Farncombe was golfing at St. Andrews, and Stanley found out by accident that Ruthven was close at hand. He went over and saw him.'

'My information is later than Mr. Farncombe's. I just left Mr. Ruthven at the stage-door of the theatre. He has been attending rehearsal.'

'Attending rehearsal! Then Farncombe must have been piling it on.'

'I have heard of stranger things. Good-day.'

I left Maidment standing on the pavement. I had not advanced another two hundred yards towards Fleet Street when I almost ran into Farncombe.

'Hallo, Ince, you're the very man I wanted to see. I say, couldn't you spare a bit for Ruthven? It's wanted badly enough.'

I know his going under just now is hard upon you, but it's harder on him. His wife is in a dreadful state, and there isn't enough to pay the funeral.'

I took a good long look at Mr. Farncombe. I have known him some years. He has the reputation of being a truthful man—that is, as men go. I myself have certainly no reason to suppose that he is an habitual liar.

'I don't think that a funeral will be required—at least, just yet.'

'My dear fellow, he's doomed. The doctor told me—what, for the matter of that, I could see for myself—that, at the most, it's only a question of days, perhaps only of hours. It is quite possible that he's dead already.'

'Possible, but not probable. I think not.'

'Why? Have you had news?'

'Slight news.'

'From his wife?'

'No; from Ruthven himself.'

'You don't mean to say he has written to you? Why, when I saw him the day before yesterday, he hadn't strength enough to raise his hand, far less to hold a pen.'

'He has now; or, at least, a few minutes ago he had.'

'A few minutes ago! What are you driving at?'

'At the facts. Which are, that I have just attended rehearsal with him, and that I have just parted with him at the stage-door of the theatre.'

'Ince, you're joking.'

'Nothing is farther from my thoughts.'

'Do you mean to tell me that Ruthven—Philip Ruthven—is actually in town?'

'Unless he has just taken train again for Scotland. Which is hardly likely, since he is to rehearse again to-morrow.'

Farncombe stood stock still in the middle of the pavement. He thrust his hands into his trousers-pockets. He knit his brows. His demeanour must have struck the passengers in the Strand as strange. 'Ince, there's a mystery somewhere. I give you my word of honour that I saw Philip Ruthven the day before yesterday at Pittenweem. He was lying in bed. His wife was crying at his side. He could not speak; he could not move. At least, every attempt at movement brought on suffocation. He could only look. Such a look! If ever I saw the near presence of death upon a man's face, I saw it then on his.'

## II.

It came—the first night. That night which means the prospect of a little fun to those in front, and which means something so very different to those behind. I make it a rule to shun the first nights of my own plays. I have a strong feeling that those are occasions on which the author is better away. That night I broke my rule.

All men say that they are not superstitious. But I fancy that, at bottom, and on occasion, we all of us are. I know that something told me that that night would be a night of disaster. I had never written a play of which I hoped greater things. I felt that I had put into it some of the best work of which I was capable. If it was a failure, then I was a failure too. And yet——

Several things worked together to bring about this unsatisfactory state of mind. But, oddly enough, they all grouped themselves about Mr. Ruthven. The more I saw of him the less I liked him. I found that this feeling of mine was shared by others. Trotter, in confidence, actually told me that he was afraid of him. He said that he never came near him without a shudder—that his presence filled him with a sense of physical repulsion. This was nonsense. I told him so. But I myself was conscious, in my heart of hearts, of something of the kind. And yet the man was inoffensive. He was the most retiring of mortals. He never spoke unless he first was spoken to. He never thrust himself to the front. Indeed, I wished he would have thrust himself a little more to the front. Anything more depressing than his demeanour at rehearsals I never witnessed. He acted like a wet blanket. He was absolutely lifeless! At the eleventh hour both Trotter and I wished that we were rid of him. But Trotter wouldn't take the initiative, and, ridiculous though it sounds, I felt I couldn't.

'You're the manager!' I reminded Trotter, who seemed to need reminding.

'And you're the author!'

'You engaged him!'

At your instigation!'

'Well, you play a leading part, and if you choose to let him spoil you, it's your affair, not mine.'

'To listen to you anybody would think that it's a matter of complete indifference to you if he ruins your play!'

All this was of course absurd. But the consequence was that the man retained his part.

As the night approached I worked myself into a state of fever. On the night itself I couldn't keep away from the theatre. An irresistible fascination drew me Strandwards. I was haunted by a hideous and altogether unreasonable suspicion that, at the last moment, Ruthven would play us a trick and fail to appear. As my cab drew up at the stage-door, I put the question to the door-keeper:

'Has Mr. Ruthven arrived?'

'Just arrived, sir.'

'Are you sure?'

The man stared.

'Quite sure, sir. He just went through.'

In spite of the man's protestation I went myself to see. I knocked at the door of Mr. Ruthven's dressing-room. There was no answer. I knocked again. Still no answer.

'Mr. Ruthven!' I cried.

Not a sound! I turned the handle. The door opened. I stepped inside. My first impression was that the room was empty. Then, looking round, I saw that something, some one, was lying on the floor. It was a man lying all of a heap. I am not ashamed to confess that, in the already agitated state of my mind, the sight of that heap filled me with a sense of distinct discomfort.

'Ruthven!' I said, 'is that you, Ruthven?'

No reply. My impulse was to seek for help. What I did was to move forward, and lay my hand upon the recumbent mass. As I did so, it moved. A face looked up at me. It was Ruthven's. But what a face! It was the face of a man long dead. White and drawn, with great, glassy, staring eyes.

'Ruthven! Aren't you well?'

He stood up, rising slowly like a corpse from a grave.

'I am quite well.'

He did not look well. He did not sound well either. His voice was harsh and husky. There was about him an air of wildness, of abandonment, which was altogether indescribable.

'A bit nervous, Ruthven—eh?'

'Nervous? I am not nervous. A man in my position is not

likely to be nervous.' His manner changed. His voice rose like the wail of a trumpet. 'Why, to-night I will witch the world with acting. I will cut for your play a notch on the tree of fame. They shall acknowledge me at last. I will charm them'—he spoke with a degree of earnestness which I did not find altogether agreeable—'with a voice from the grave.'

I did not stay with him long. I did not find his company congenial.

'Mad!' I told myself, as I left his dressing-room. 'I believe the man's stark mad! I only hope that his madness has a method, and that he will do as he says, and pull the piece through. Hollo! What do you want here?'

This ejaculation was caused by suddenly encountering Maidment wandering about behind the scenes as though he were strolling through the halls of his fathers.

'I'm going in front. I thought I'd just come round and ask you what you were going to do.'

'Do you mean now, or in ten years' time?'

Maidment laughed. He seemed to think I was joking.

'Whom have you got to take Ruthven's place?'

'Confound it, Maidment, you seem to be uncommonly anxious that I should get some one to take Ruthven's place.'

He laughed again. He seemed in a laughing mood.

'How have you managed about a substitute? You must have found Ruthven's death a little awkward.'

'Death!' I fancy I started. Maidment stared at me. 'Ruthven's death!'

'Haven't you heard?'

'Heard what?'

'My dear fellow, you don't mean to say that you don't know that Philip Ruthven died last night.'

For a moment I was speechless: it was with an effort I drew myself together.

'Look here, Maidment: I have a great respect for your character, but, if you don't take care, I shall lose it. I don't know in what society you have been mixing lately, but it must have been in that of persons who are descendants in the right line from Ananias. I have just left Mr. Ruthven in his room. He is not in his coffin. He is dressing for the stage. If you require ocular demonstration of that fact, you shall have it, if you will only go in front and take your seat, and wait till he comes on.'



I had hardly rid myself of Maidment when Miss Stacey came up. She seemed to be in a state of excitement, and even of distress.

'Now what's to be done?'

I sighed. No more first nights for me!

'My dear Miss Stacey, would you kindly address that question to some one else, and ask me another?'

'But I hear that Mr. Ruthven's dead?'

'That is exactly what I hear. But Mr. Ruthven himself assures me that he isn't. He is at present in his room, and tells me that he is in excellent health. He is engaged, my dear Miss Stacey, in doing what you ought to be doing, and that is—dressing.'

Two or three other people had come up.

'What's that? Ruthven's not dead? Why,' said Cardewe, 'everybody's talking about it at the club.'

'Babree, of the *Herald*, just told me that he had heard of it through the Central News.'

That was Charlie Gordon! He is one of those men who are always hearing things, is Gordon.

'Tom Dawson tells me that he has had it in a private wire.'

That was Rayne—Cecil Rayne. He's another man like Gordon.

'Gentlemen, if you desire to hear Mr. Ruthven's own testimony as to whether he is or is not dead, I shall be happy to escort you, so that you may interview him in his dressing-room.'

'Not I!' said Gordon. 'I wouldn't for a fiver! I'm not fond of ghosts!'

Miss Stacey gave a little scream. She clasped her hands with what I imagine she thought was an effective gesture.

'Joking apart,' said Rayne, 'I don't like these stories being always told about a man. He ought to be dead, if everybody says he is. Upon my word, it's quite upset me.'

I should have liked to box their ears. But a man cannot assault his company on the first night of his own play—and *before* the curtain rises! Afterwards, of course, it is a different thing.

'Ladies and gentlemen, might I ask you to adjourn to your own apartments?'

They were just moving off, when who should come blundering up but Trotter. I immediately saw that he was as bad as they were—and worse.

‘Ince, what’s all this I hear about Ruthven? Is he dead?’

‘No, my dear Trotter, he is not dead!—not dead!—not dead! As I have just been explaining to our friends here, he is at the present moment alive and kicking in his dressing-room. Might I venture to suggest that it would be no harm if somebody else was alive and kicking in his dressing-room as well?’

I went upstairs with him. He seemed half beside himself.

‘Ince, are you sure that Ruthven’s in his dressing-room?’

‘As sure as I am that you at present are in yours.’

‘Are you sure it’s Ruthven?’

‘Do you suggest that it’s his ghost?’

‘Ince’—he caught me, with no slight pressure, by the arm—‘last night I dreamt that he was dead; not once, nor twice, but over and over again. I kept on dreaming it. I saw that he was dead; I knew that he was dead. I have stayed indoors all day to get myself a little calm. Calm! Feel my pulse; I’m in something like a raging fever! As I was coming down to the theatre half-a-dozen men stopped me to tell me that Ruthven was dead.’

‘My dear Trotter, would you like to step downstairs and ask the man himself if he is dead?’

‘No.’ He moved across the room with an unmistakable shudder. ‘Not for worlds! It—it will be time enough to meet him when we meet upon the stage. Ince, do you know that I half believe that I am going mad?’

This was pleasant hearing! Trotter, who was at once manager and leading actor, half believed he was going mad. I myself believed in Ruthven’s madness. So that it only required that I should be attacked with sudden softening of the brain to make a trio.

On all first nights everybody behind is in a state of what may mildly be termed nervous excitement. They may not always show it, but they always are. As regards nervous excitement, *that* first night eclipsed the record. Of those principally concerned *I* was the coolest. When I mention that, to the best of my judgment and belief, my temperature was about two hundred degrees in the shade, that fact speaks volumes. I had serious thoughts, even at the last moment, of enforcing a postponement of the whole affair. But I didn’t.

The curtain rose; the play began. The scene of the first act was laid in a room in a common lodging-house in the East-end of London. There was a good deal of business. The lodgers were

coming and going. The principal theme of their conversation was a great crime which had just been committed in one of the suburbs. There was one there who listened—a woman; and as she listened she knew who had done it—she recognised his workmanship. As they talked of the large reward which had been offered for the discovery of the criminal, a great hunger began to fill her soul and a desire to rise out of the depths into which she had sunk and to attain to comparative affluence by means—of the price of blood. This guilty man had been her lover. She loved him still. But she told herself that he was doomed—doomed! Some one would gain by his eternal fall; and why not she? As she went off upon her errand the man himself, against whom all men's hands would soon be turned, came on. This was Blaise Townshend, known to his then associates as 'Gentleman Jo.' He was a man who had been buffeted and torn—a genius gone wrong, an inventor none of whose inventions had attained fruition. Crammed full of ideas which seemed all to be abortions, the devil had got into him—that devil which comes to disappointed and to hungry men—and, extreme in everything, he had sunk to this—to crime.

While the opening was being played, like a restless spirit I was wandering about behind. The call was passed for Mr. Ruthven. As he came I shrank away, so marvellously did his appearance realise the creation of my fancy—the man with a devil. It was difficult to believe that this was the lifeless creature who had droned through the rehearsals. Two minutes after his entrance the house was in a tumult of applause. He had done what every actor hopes to do one day, and which scarcely one in a generation does do—he had taken his audience by storm. Instead of the disaster which I feared, it already seemed that I was within measurable distance of that stupendous, that fairylike, that world-echoing success for which we work, and of which we dream.

After Ruthven's entrance the action moved quickly. He was left alone with the journals, whose columns were filled with the story of his crime. He gloated over the hideous details with a sort of devilish exultation. While he was thus engaged a visitor entered, an unusual visitor in those parts—a lawyer who had brought him news—news of the death of a distant relative who had died in a far-off portion of the world, and who had left him one of those immeasurable fortunes which are characteristics of the day. The lawyer had come in person to offer his congratulations. And already the shadow of the gallows was falling over him. And

while the tale is being told the woman returns from her Judas-errand and hears it all. She has sold the man she loves, this ten times millionaire, for a mess of pottage. Already the avengers of blood are at his heels.

When the curtain fell the audience gave Ruthven a call which shook the theatre. It was his success, not mine; his acting which told, not that of his companions. I went on to the stage to shake him by the hand; but he walked past me as though he did not see that I was there.

'Ruthven!' I cried.

If he heard he paid no heed. Walking straight on, he vanished out of sight. His demeanour was so strange that I hardly knew what to make of it. Trotter was standing by me; he had been acting the lawyer.

'He is either a genius of the first water, or else the Old Gentleman himself. When I was telling him that story about the fortune which had been left to him, the look upon his face made my blood run cold.'

'I believe,' said Gordon, 'that he is the Old Gentleman.'

'He has made me all of a tremble,' declared Miss Stacey. She had played the woman who betrayed Blaise Townshend. 'I really don't think I can go on with him again; he frightens me.'

She sank into a chair and burst into something very like hysterics. I pooh-poohed their words as nonsense. I hurried them off to their dressing-rooms, but I declined Trotter's invitation to accompany him upstairs; I went out into the street to get a breath of air. I myself was haunted by a feeling that there was something about Ruthven which was not altogether what it should be. I had no desire to make it worse by listening to Trotter's ravings.

That night?—well, who does not know that that night was a blaze of triumph? Disaster?—disaster there was none. Ruthven went on from victory to victory—to a perfect triumph! The house was in a frenzy. Yet his companions on the stage, and those behind, shunned him as though he were the plague. Even I held aloof from the man who had done, who was still doing, so much for the offspring of my brain. There *was* something about him which certainly was strange.

The last act was on. My pulse was beating like a sledge-hammer. I was straining my ears to listen to the intense silence in which the house was hanging on Ruthven's last great scene. Suddenly some one came rushing wildly towards me; it was

Farncombe. He appeared to be in a state of extraordinary excitement; his coat-tails were flying in the wind; his hat was at the back of his head.

'Ince!'

It was a gasp rather than an articulate utterance. My first impression was that he was drunk, though undoubtedly he was no drunkard. He was trembling as though he could hardly stand. His eyes were unnaturally distended; his whole countenance exhibited mental disorder.

'Give—give me a chair!'

He clutched at a chair. He sank into it, trembling all the time as though he had a fit of ague. This was a case of something more than drunkenness.

'Farncombe, what is wrong?'

He seemed to struggle to speak.

'Ince'—he caught at his throat as if he were suffocating—  
'Ince, have you got any brandy?'

I went to Trotter's private store and poured him out a wine-glassful. He drank it at a gulp, neat.

'Give me some more.'

I poured him out another glass. He drank that too; it seemed to do him good.

'Ince, do you think I'm mad?'

'Or drunk?'

'You think I'm drunk? I've been travelling all day from Scotland; I have only just arrived in town. It is therefore extremely probable that I am drunk, it being my invariable habit to get that way when I spend the day in railway trains.'

'I was only joking. What's the matter?'

Directly I asked the question his trembling fit came back again. He looked about the room in such a way that I really began to think that he was in the early stages of delirium.

'Ince, I—I saw him!'

'Saw whom?'

'Ruthven!'

'Ruthven?'

'On the stage! Great Heaven!'

He put his hands before his face; he trembled like a leaf. The case seemed clear enough.

'Come, Farncombe, I think you would be better at home.'

He looked at me, his face as white as this sheet of paper.

'You think so? Perhaps I had. Perhaps the strain has been too great. But I must be pretty bad, because I could have sworn I saw him.'

'Of course you saw him.'

'Of course—I saw him?'

I never saw such a look of astonishment upon a person's face before.

'Where's the mystery? If you have been in front you must have seen him. Ruthven is breaking the record. I never saw such acting.'

Farncombe had stood up, rising to his feet as if automatically. Now he sank back again as if I had struck him a blow.

'It was his ghost!'

'His ghost?'

'Ince, Ruthven's dead!'

'Dead? You've got hold of that nonsensical story which is going the rounds.'

He looked at me in silence for a second or two. Then he put his hand into an inner pocket of his coat. He took out a pocket-book. From the pocket-book he took a folded paper. This he handed me. I opened it. It purported to be the medical certificate of Philip Ruthven's death!

'Farncombe! What—what is this?'

'The doctor's certificate.'

'Some one has been fooling you. The man is as much alive as I am.'

'Ince!—Farncombe rose. He came close to me. He almost whispered in my ear—'I saw him die.'

'You—saw him die?'

'I saw him die. At Pittenweem, yesterday evening, at nine o'clock.'

'But—it's impossible.'

'Ince, listen to me. The other day, when you told me that Ruthven was rehearsing, I couldn't understand it. But I supposed that it was all right, until, a day or two ago, I had a letter from Mrs. Ruthven, asking for the loan of a sovereign. She said that Ruthven was at death's door, and that they were absolutely penniless. I posted straight away to Pittenweem. I found things were as she said. Ince, last night he died. His wife, the doctor, and I were present. Directly afterwards I got the doctor to give me a certificate. Mrs. Ruthven was anxious that he should be

brought to Kensal Green, where his little girl lies buried. And I thought that if I had the medical certificate in my pocket I could manage a whip among you fellows for the funds; and, later on, we might get up a benefit. Ince, where's that brandy?'

He helped himself to another glass. I felt that I myself should be none the worse for one, but I did not say so.

'So to-day I came back again. I knew this was your first night. As I was coming along I wondered how you would manage. I wondered also why you told me that cock-and-bull story about Ruthven rehearsing. Because, as Mrs. Ruthven informed me, and as I could see for myself, he had never been out of bed since the day I saw him last. It was late when I reached town. I thought I would come and see how you were getting on. I drove straight here. When I got inside, the first person I saw upon the stage was—Philip Ruthven!'

He paused. He gave a little gasp. I also was almost reduced to gasping-point.

'I caught his eye. He caught mine. He gave me such a look!'

Farncombe covered his face. He shuddered. There was an interval of silence. Then I spoke.

'But, Farncombe, he has been rehearsing all the time.'

'You don't mean it?'

'He has!'

'Then it was his ghost!'

'But, apart from any other consideration, how can that be, when you say that the man was actually alive?'

'Heaven knows! I don't!'

'He is at this moment on the stage.'

'Let me get away! Let me go home! Ince, I wouldn't meet him for a thousand pounds! If you had only seen him die!'

He hurried away. I hurried after him. As we were going the curtain fell. As it fell there rose a hurricane of applause, which seemed to shake the building. People came hurrying to and from the stage. In a moment we were in the centre of an excited crowd.

'They're calling him,' I said.

'Calling him! Philip Ruthven! Ince, Philip Ruthven lies dead in a little room which looks out upon the sea. It—it must all be some hideous dream.'

Just then Trotter came up.



'Is that you, Farncombe? Did you ever hear such a tumult? There never was such acting! No one is in it to-night but him.'

'But whom?'

'Ruthven!'

'Ruthven! Trotter'—Farncombe clutched at Trotter's arm—'it's Ruthven's ghost.'

'Farncombe!'

'It is! I swear it is! Ruthven's dead! I saw him die!'

Trotter stared; well he might.

'When?'

'Last night!'

Trotter leaned against the wall. He appeared to need its support to help him stand.

"My prophetic soul!—my uncle!" Ince, I told you he was dead! I knew he was. I dreamt it. I dreamt that I saw him lying dead, and I saw that the clock was just on nine.'

'Yes,' said Farncombe, 'the clock was just on nine.'

'Great Jupiter! And I've been acting with a ghost!'

Several others joined us.

'A ghost?' said Gordon. 'What's that?'

Trotter turned to him.

'We've been acting with a ghost—the ghost of Ruthven.'

'You're joking!'

'Ruthven's dead. He died last night at nine. Farncombe saw him die.'

The crowd fell back. Ruthven was standing within a yard of us. The tumult still continued in the theatre. I wondered, even then, if they were calling for the author. Seldom has an author felt less inclined to bow his thanks! Ruthven's eyes blazed like lightning. He seemed to have increased in height. At that moment his very personality would in itself have been almost sufficient to carry a scene.

'You saw him die!'

He addressed himself to Farncombe. He spoke with a strength of passion which was in uncomfortable consonance with his entire bearing. At sight of him Farncombe shrank away—as, indeed, we all did.

'Ruthven!'

'Yes—Ruthven!'

Ruthven stretched out his hands in front of him. He uttered his own name almost in a shriek. For a moment I thought that

Farncombe was going to have a fit, or else turn tail and flee. But he did neither. Suddenly he rushed forward at the man before us.

'It's not!' he shouted—'by the Lord! it isn't Philip—it's his brother! What a fool I've been!'

Not the least surprising incident of that night was the extraordinary change which took place in Farncombe's bearing. Ruthven broke into a peal of discordant laughter—laughter which suggested anything but merriment. He still held out his hands with the same wild gesture.

'It isn't Philip—it's his brother! Philip's dead! He died last night—in misery and beggary! His life-dreams faded, his hopes all blasted! The voice which told him that his time would come proved a liar after all!'

Advancing a step or two, he addressed himself directly to Trotter and to me.

'And I—I'm a fraud!—a swindler! It's a clear case of impersonation—send for the police! I'm only Ruthven's brother! Years ago I tried my luck upon the boards, and failed! and failed! and failed! I tried again, and failed again! I was a failure even in a booth! Ha! ha! ha! As a super I almost failed! But I knew that it was in me, all the time, if I could only get a chance, and I could only get it out. And then Philip fell ill. He had had a little better luck than mine, but he too had been kicked from pillar to post. Six months out of a shop, and six months a couple of pounds a week—that had been the sort of thing with him. I went and saw him as he lay in bed. He told me that Robert Ince had seen him act, and had offered him the big part in his new play. His chance had come at last—as he lay dying. The dream of his life was realised—when he was face to face with death. Half in joke, he put an idea into my head. He said I believed in my own powers; no one knew him up in town; why didn't I take his part? I said nothing, but I took the scrip away and read it. As I read it I knew that *my* chance had come; that this was the part of which I had been dreaming; that I was fitted to a hair; that, if I could only get the chance of playing it, this time I should not fail. I told him so. He was incredulous. He wanted at least to write and suggest me as his substitute. But I knew better. I knew that it wasn't likely that the odd man in a fit-up travelling leg-show would be allowed to create the big part in a new piece by one of the most

famous dramatists of the day, at a first-rate West-end London theatre. So he let me go. And you took me for Philip. And you thought I was a stick at rehearsals. So I was. I was half-fed, I was ill-lodged, I was pretty nearly penniless. I knew that Philip was dying. I realised, a little late, the responsibility I had taken on my shoulders. My heart sank. I began to think that, after all, I should fail. But this morning I—I heard that Philip was dead, and—and I went mad, and—and I came down to the theatre, and—and—— You hear those shouts? You hear that noise? I'm a fraud! I'm not Philip—I'm his brother! It's a clear case of impersonation! But I've not failed! Not failed!

Just then Clifford, the acting-manager, came hurrying up.

'I don't know if you're aware that there's something very like a riot in the house. I don't know what's the matter behind here, but nobody seems paying much attention. They're calling for the author!'

The author went.

## OUR ARCTIC HEROES.

THE greatest interest which, perhaps, has ever been taken by Englishmen in the matter of Arctic research, was aroused by the disappearance of Sir John Franklin and his comrades in the *Erebus* and *Terror*. These two ships had left the Thames on May 19, 1845, in search of the North-West Passage to India.

In 1847, as nothing had been heard of them, it was first decided to send out a search expedition to find Sir John; and from that time onward, no less than forty expeditions were made with the same object; but none went near the spot in which the missing party might have been found. There was, however, one man who, *if his advice had been taken in time*, would actually have carried timely aid to the lost Franklin Expedition. That man was a naval surgeon, Dr. King. He held that the missing party would be found upon the western shores of King William's Island by a journey down the Great Fish River similar to that which he had already made in company with Sir G. Back in 1833-4-5. And the subsequent researches of Dr. Rae, and those of Lieutenant Hobson, proved that this was the exact locality in which the missing party would have been found.

It is very easy to be wise after the event, yet it is almost incredible that not the least attention was ever paid to Dr. King's most reasonable suggestion; and that, with the sole exception of Sir John Richardson's Expedition, which did not proceed far enough, every single searching party was sent out with directions based upon the supposition that Sir John Franklin had disobeyed his orders as to the route he was to attempt; and *therefore* that he would be found in an altogether different direction.

Dr. King and that most loving and devoted woman and wife, Lady Franklin, had from the very first held to the notion that Sir John had disappeared through having tried to follow out his instructions.

It must be remembered that those instructions were very precise and clear. They were couched in these words:—'That after passing through Lancaster Sound and Barrow Strait, he was to proceed to about lat. 74° N., long. 98° W., in the vicinity of Cape Walker (a point just to the northward of Prince of Wales's Land),

and from thence to penetrate to the southward and westward in a course as direct to Behring Strait as the position of the ice and existence of land at present unknown may admit.'

Nothing could have been more distinct than these orders, and yet only the proposals of Dr. King, the route taken by Sir J. Richardson and afterwards by Captain Collinson, were based upon the supposition that Sir John Franklin was beset in the ice in trying to carry out his instructions. The former proposed to go straight to Sir John's actual position by way of the Great Fish River; and the latter to meet him, at any point he might have reached in trying to follow the coast line of the continent of America, so as to come out at Behring Strait.

But, as we know, Dr. King's proposals were summarily rejected by Lord Palmerston's Government; Sir John Richardson turned back too soon, after having gone for some distance in the right direction, while Captain Collinson never knew, until some years later, how very near he had been to making the double discovery of the fate of the Franklin Expedition and the existence of the only navigable North-West Passage.

Of the many search expeditions it is only proposed in what follows to give a very hasty sketch of three; namely, those conducted respectively by Captain Collinson in the *Enterprise*, Captain McClure in the *Investigator*, and Captain McClintock in the *Fox*, besides making mention of the results achieved by Dr. Rae, of the Hudson's Bay Company, in his celebrated journey overland to the mouth of the Great Fish River. And the reason for making this limited selection is that both Dr. Rae and Captain McClintock discovered traces of Sir John Franklin's missing expedition, and brought home articles which had belonged to its members; while Captain Collinson only just missed anticipating them both; and Captain McClure, though far enough from the track of the ships he sought, yet actually accomplished, with the whole of his officers and crew, the North-West Passage, though compelled to abandon his ship in so doing. Yet, as a matter of fact, Captain McClure was not the first to discover the existence of a North-West Passage, for the members of Sir John Franklin's Expedition had, before they died, established the existence of another North-West Passage in a lower latitude by connecting together the surveys of Sir James Ross with those of Messrs. Dease and Simpson.

And here, while speaking of the survey of Sir James Clark Ross in this direction, mention should be made of the discovery by

him of the Magnetic Pole on the western coast of Boothia Felix. Everyone now knows that the Terrestrial Pole and the Magnetic Pole are not coincident in position, and that while the former represents the northern extremity of the earth's axis, and is, of course, in north latitude  $90^\circ$ , the latter is the mysterious spot to which, in whatever position of the earth's surface it may be placed, the magnetic needle always points, and this is in north latitude  $70^\circ 5' 17''$ , west longitude  $96^\circ 46' 45''$ , *i.e.* according to Sir James Ross in 1831. The probability, however, is that the position of the Magnetic Pole is not always the same, but that, as it is affected by the sun, or possibly by sun spots, it travels round in an ellipse of small excentricity and of very limited size practically in a small circle.

No one knows, and therefore no one can explain, the precise reason why a magnetised needle does point to that mysterious spot on the coast of Boothia Felix; and, strange as it may seem, there was in 1831 no visible trace of anything by which that spot could be recognised, not even so much as a small hillock in the immediate neighbourhood, and the only means of proving that the Magnetic Pole had been reached was by the total inactivity of the compass at that spot, coupled with the almost vertical position of the dipping needle. On this most interesting point the very words of Sir James Ross himself shall be given:—‘The amount of the dip as indicated by my dipping needle was  $89^\circ 59'$ , being thus within *one minute* of the vertical; while the proximity at least of this Pole, if not its actual existence where we stood, was further confirmed by the action, or rather by the total inaction, of the several horizontal needles then in my possession. These were suspended in the most delicate manner possible, but there was not one which showed the slightest effort to move from the position in which it was placed, a fact which even the most moderately informed of readers must now know to be one which proves that the centre of attraction lies at a very small horizontal distance, if at any.’

Theoretically speaking, the actual point of observation upon which Sir James Ross last deposited his dipping needle and compasses was one minute, or about one English mile from the true Magnetic Pole of that day, but whether one mile to the north, south, east, or west of it he was not able to decide. It would have been necessary for him to spend some little time on the spot, and to take several independent observations from

different places in different directions at a considerable distance from one another, before he could have decided so important a point. But, alas! time, provisions, and strength were alike wanting; and, even as it was, he was only just able to regain his ship in safety, his last particle of strength expended, and his last biscuit consumed. And throughout the long series of Arctic voyages this has again and again been the fate of sledging parties, namely, that just at the most critical moment, when some most important discovery was about to be made, provisions and fuel ran short, and even by the most rigid economy were only just made to hold out long enough to regain the ship, or other base of operations; and then all had to be commenced over again.

In 1850 the fear had taken a strong hold upon the mind of the nation that some serious accident must have happened to the *Erebus* and *Terror*, and in that year alone no less than ten expeditions set sail in search of the missing party. Among these was the one under the command of Captain Richard Collinson, consisting of the two sailing ships *Enterprise* and *Investigator*, the former under the command of Collinson himself, the latter of Captain Robert McClure. This latter officer had in 1837, during the American rebellion, served under the father of the writer of this narrative, when he was commodore of the Lake Squadron. And so it came about that, after rounding Point Barrow, which was then supposed to be the northernmost point of the continent of America, Captain McClure named the first unknown point of land which he discovered by the name of his old captain, little thinking that more than forty years later, when he himself would be in his grave, the son of that same old captain of his would be writing about his most brilliant achievement in Arctic discovery, and thanking him for his courtesy in perpetuating on the Arctic chart the name which he bears. These two ships sailed from England on January 20, 1850, to make the passage round Cape Horn and to enter the Arctic regions through Behring Strait. They were both provisioned for three years, although it was not at all anticipated that they would be absent so long. The *Enterprise* was much the faster vessel of the two, and she reached the Strait of Magellan eight days before her consort, and Honolulu in the Sandwich Islands six days sooner; but strange to say, by a bold attempt at a direct course to Behring Strait, instead of following the usual but more devious course for sailing ships, the



*Investigator* arrived first at the appointed rendezvous, Cape Lisburne, and eventually went on into the Arctic ice alone.

Captain Collinson followed closely behind, but nevertheless was unable to double Point Barrow in 1850, while McClure had already done so; and then Collinson formed what many thought an unwise decision, namely, not to spend that winter in the Arctic seas at all. Accordingly he returned by the way he came, spending the winter at Sydney in New South Wales, a proceeding which laid the foundation for much subsequent difficulty between his officers and himself. In the following year he returned north, rounded Point Barrow, and keeping in the open water which skirts the northern coast of America, which open water is caused by the effluent waters of the Colville, Mackenzie, and Coppermine Rivers flowing along the coast, he followed in the track of the *Investigator*; and strange to say, like that ship, made the attempt to pass into Melville Sound by way of Prince of Wales Strait; and although he pushed his ship a few miles further into Melville Sound than the *Investigator* had been, he was unable to get through and was forced to winter there in 1851-2. Starting again in the summer of 1852, Captain Collinson, failing to round Nelson Head, the southern extremity of Banks' Land, steered at once in a southerly direction, and passing around Wollaston Land, through Dolphin and Union Strait, Coronation Gulf, and Dease's Strait, finally went into his winter quarters, 1852-3, in Cambridge Bay, at the Victoria end of Wollaston Land. And it was from this bay that Captain Collinson himself travelled with a sledge to the furthest point he ever reached, namely, Gateshead Island, where he was within forty miles of the spot where the *Erebus* and *Terror* had been abandoned, and within fifty-five miles of Point Victory in King William Island, a point to which Collinson knew that Sir James Ross had penetrated from Baffin's Bay and Lancaster Sound in 1831; and had he only decided to strike across to Point Victory, instead of returning to his ship in Cambridge Bay, he would have found himself not only the first living discoverer of the North-West Passage, but would also without doubt have discovered the cairn at Point Victory, within which Lieutenant Hobson of McClintock's Expedition afterwards found the only record we have ever had of the fate of the Franklin Expedition. It is, however, very problematical whether at the time that Captain Collinson stood on Gateshead Island, looking over towards King William Island, he could have saved the lives of any of Sir John Franklin's

party, for even then they had been out *eight* years, having originally only been supplied with three years' provisions; and, as it will be remembered, even of this quantity nearly all the preserved meats had failed them and had been left behind at Beechey Island, their winter quarters of 1845-6, having been condemned as unfit for human food.

From Cambridge Bay Captain Collinson returned by the way he came, being unable, however, to get round Point Barrow again without spending another winter, 1853-4, in the Arctic regions; and it was towards the latter end of 1854, or the beginning of 1855, when the writer of these lines was living with his father at the Cape of Good Hope, in the Naval Dockyard, that a very ugly-looking bluff-bowed ship made her number, as she stood into Simons Bay, which told us that the long lost *Enterprise* had returned to the land of the living, at a time when many feared she had gone down with all hands, for nothing whatever had been heard of her since she had left Sydney early in 1851. And then, within a few hours, the writer of these words sat at his dear old father's mahogany table, exactly opposite to Captain Collinson, and saw him enjoying the first good dinner he had eaten for many a long year. It was during that dinner, or rather after it, when the Arctic explorer was telling the tale of his hair-breadth escapes, that the foundation of this narrative was laid.

The *Investigator* meanwhile had fared better in all respects than her consort, with the senior officer on board, for although she left her bones to perish in the ice, yet she carried her crew so far from the Pacific to the Atlantic Ocean, that they were able to walk over the ice from the *Investigator* in Mercy Bay to the *Resolute* at Dealy Island; thus in their own persons making the North-West Passage, a feat which for four hundred years had often been attempted, but never before accomplished.

Looking at the perfected map of the Polar regions which we now have, it seems a very easy thing indeed to have done, but we must remember that McClure had literally to feel his way along, and at the same time to construct his chart as he went. His ship passed through Behring Strait late in the summer of 1850, rounded Point Barrow in safety, and, hugging the American shore, attempted to pass through Prince of Wales Strait, but was stopped by the fixed ice of Melville Sound; and, unable to retreat, was compelled to winter there. In the following summer Captain McClure retraced his steps to the entrance of Prince of Wales

Strait, and steering due north skirted round Banks' Land, which thus he had discovered to be an island, and eventually he laid up his ship in a small bay, called Mercy Bay, on the east coast of Banks' Land, where she would now be found, unless indeed the ice has caused her to die the natural death of an Arctic ship. Two more winters were spent in Mercy Bay, and much valuable work done by sledge parties exploring the adjacent coast lines. But at last the time came when provisions began to run short, and it was felt that an attempt must be made (in their case almost a hopeless one) to abandon the ship, and to travel southward to the mouth of the Mackenzie River. Had this attempt been made, and had Captain McClure abandoned his ship and started on that perilous voyage, the probability is that not a soul would have lived to tell the story of their discovery of a North-West Passage.

But just when all was ready to make a start, and the word was about to be given, 'All hands abandon ship,' Captain McClure, with his first lieutenant, thought he would go and have a last look round, and bid a long adieu to the now familiar Bay of Mercy, when all of a sudden they espied a strange-looking object approaching them. This was on April 6, 1853, when, to use Captain McClure's own words, 'we perceived a figure walking rapidly towards us. From his pace and gestures we both naturally supposed at first that he was some one of our party pursued by a bear, but as we approached him doubts arose as to who it could be. He was certainly unlike any of our men, and yet we felt certain that no one else was near. When within about two hundred yards of us this strange figure threw up his arms and made gesticulations resembling those used by an Esquimaux, besides shouting at the top of his voice words which, from the wind and the intense excitement of the moment, sounded like a wild screech; and this brought us fairly to a standstill. The stranger came quietly on, and we saw that his face was as black as ebony, and really at the moment we might be pardoned for wondering whether he was a denizen of this or the other world, and had he but given us a glimpse of a tail or a cloven hoof we should assuredly have taken to our legs. As it was we gallantly stood our ground, and, had the skies fallen upon us, we could hardly have been more astonished than when the dark-faced stranger called out, "I am Lieutenant Pim, late of the *Herald* and now in the *Resolute*; Captain Kellett is in her at Dealy Island." It can readily be imagined what astonishment these few words created when it is remembered that on July 31

or August 1, 1850, Captain Kellett, in the *Herald*, had parted with the *Investigator* after passing through Behring Strait from the Pacific; and, strange to say, the very last officer of the *Herald* to leave the deck of the *Investigator* off Point Barrow had been Lieutenant Bedford Pim, while on that April 6, 1853, the dark-faced stranger who came to the rescue of the starving heroes of Arctic discovery was the very same officer, under the same captain, having in the meantime returned round the Horn to England, and gone north again, in another ship, through the Atlantic by way of Baffin's Bay and Lancaster Sound. So that the mysterious stranger who suddenly appeared before the astonished McClure well knew the cause for the start of incredulity with which his speech was received: 'I am Lieutenant Bedford Pim, late of the *Herald*, and now in the *Resolute*. Captain Kellett is in her at Dealy Island.'

Thus the whole party were rescued, walking safely over the ice of Melville Sound to the *Resolute*, and thence in detachments were taken back to England; not indeed having found Sir John Franklin, or any traces of him, but having made, in their own persons, the long sought after North-West Passage from ocean to ocean. It had never been done before, and in all human probability it will never be done again.

It was just after this time, when no one expected further tidings of Sir John Franklin and his party, that Dr. Rae, who had simply gone out on a geographical expedition to connect Sir James Ross's Magnetic Pole with his own former discoveries to the southward of it, sent home the startling intelligence that he had met an Esquimaux who told him that a large party of white men had died of starvation, a long distance to the westward, and beyond a large river, and this river he thought was Back's Great Fish River, an idea which afterwards proved to be correct.

The story told to Dr. Rae by the Esquimaux was that, six winters before, while some of his countrymen were killing seals near the north end of King William Island, about forty white men were seen dragging a boat and sledges over the ice on the west side of the island. All the men, he said, hauled the drag ropes except one tall, stout, middle-aged officer (doubtless Captain Crozier). And further, he said, they were evidently in want of provisions, and signified by signs that they were going where they expected to find deer to shoot. Later on in the same season the corpses of thirty persons and some graves were discovered on the continent of America, and five dead bodies on an island near it.

These without doubt were the last survivors of the Franklin Expedition. Some of the bodies were in a tent, others under a boat, which had been turned keel up so as to form a shelter, and some were scattered about in different directions. Dr. Rae on this expedition succeeded in purchasing from the Esquimaux various articles, especially silver spoons and forks, which had belonged to different officers of Franklin's ships, and which had their initials or crests engraved upon them. Upon his return, the sum of 10,000*l.* was paid to him and his party as the reward offered to anyone who would obtain authentic information of the fate of the Franklin Expedition.

Later on—*i.e.* in 1855—our Government requested the Hudson's Bay Company to send another party down the Great Fish River to explore its estuary, and search for any further traces of our missing countrymen. Accordingly Mr. Anderson, one of their factors, was selected for this purpose, and he too discovered traces of the Franklin party at the rapids, just below Franklin Lake. He also discovered the spot on Montreal Island where the Esquimaux had broken up the boat; but he could not find a scrap of paper or a record, or a single human bone, or even a grave. The relics of the Franklin Expedition before mentioned were exhibited in the Naval Exhibition at Chelsea in 1891, and they are now to be seen in the Museum at Greenwich Hospital.

Very naturally, Lady Franklin was not satisfied with this negative result; and she urged the government of that day to send yet another searching expedition by sea to King William Island, or its vicinity, for the purpose of, clearing up the mystery and uncertainty which surrounded the fate of her beloved husband and his gallant companions. But in this she failed. Yet, nothing daunted, she herself, almost at her own cost, fitted out the yacht *Fox*, and, placing her under the command of Captain Leopold McClintock, sent her out in 1857 to go and bring her back tidings of her lost husband.

At first the *Fox* was most unfortunate, for, in trying to make the North Water at the head of Baffin's Bay, she was beset in the pack, and drifted helplessly with it for 242 days, for 1385 statute miles, thus losing a whole season.

The next year she returned to the charge, passed safely up Baffin's Bay into the North Water, across through Lancaster Sound and Barrow Strait, down Prince Regent's Inlet, almost through Bellot Strait, near the western entrance of which, in a

small bay called Kennedy Harbour, the gallant little *Fox* was frozen in for her second winter. And from thence McClintock equipped those three sledging parties, two of which were destined to solve the question of the fate of the Franklin Expedition, and the early death of Sir John himself; and the other to add many hundreds of miles of undiscovered land to the Arctic chart.

The first party, under the charge of Captain Allen Young, was to examine the land to the westward of Cape Bird, off the western entrance to Bellot Strait; the second, under the command of Lieutenant Hobson, to go down the west coast of Boothia Felix, and, crossing over to the north end of King William Island, to explore a portion of its western shores in search of traces of the *Erebus* and *Terror*, and thence over to Gateshead Island so as to connect if possible that point with Mr. Wynniatt's furthest; the third, under the command of McClintock himself, was to accompany Lieutenant Hobson as far as King William Island, and from thence to pass, by the eastern coast of that island, to the mouth of the Great Fish River, returning to the *Fox* by the western side of King William Island.

On the way down McClintock and Hobson met some Esquimaux, who told them that a long time ago two ships had been wrecked off their coast; that one ship went down as she was, while the other was driven on shore, but the exact spot mentioned could never be found. One of the natives said that when they boarded the stranded ship they found the body of one man, but that the rest of the crew went away to the large river. Lower down some more Esquimaux were met with, and these were found to be in possession of silver spoons and forks bearing the crests and initials of Sir John Franklin, Captain Crozier, Captain Fitzjames, and others. These articles McClintock obtained from them at the price of four needles each. Going on further south, Montreal Island and Point Ogle were each visited, but without result of any kind. Returning up the western shore of King William Island, the first trace which McClintock met with of the missing crews of the *Erebus* and *Terror* was the skeleton of a single man, apparently an officer's servant or a ship's steward. Off Cape Herschel McClintock found a small cairn erected by Lieutenant Hobson, who had been there but six days previously, and who had left a letter for his commanding officer saying that, although he had failed to find any traces of the wrecked ships in the position described by the Esquimaux, yet he had succeeded in discovering



the only written record of the doings of Sir John Franklin and his companions since parting with the whalers at the head of Baffin's Bay; the only record indeed of any kind which has ever been discovered from that time to this.

That record was found in a cairn which had been erected by the retreating Franklin party at Point Victory, the nearest point of land to the place in which the *Erebus* and *Terror* had been abandoned. It was simply a printed paper supplied to all discovery ships; and upon it was written, apparently by Lieutenant Graham Gore, the following account, and although Arctic travellers and those who have taken an interest in Arctic researches are quite familiar with it, from reading McClintock's charming book on 'the fate of Franklin and his discoveries' commonly known as 'the Voyage of the *Fox*,' yet for the benefit of others, who have never seen it, the record is here repeated. It runs thus:—'28th of May, 1847, H.M. ships *Erebus* and *Terror* wintered in the ice in latitude 70° 5' N.—longitude 98° 23' W., having wintered in 1846–7 at Beechey Island in latitude 74° 43' 28" N.—longitude 91° 39' 15" W., after having ascended Wellington Channel to latitude 77° and returned by the West side of Cornwallis Island. Sir John Franklin commanding the expedition. All well. A party consisting of two officers and six men left the ships on Monday, 24th May, 1847.'

There is a slight inaccuracy in this record, as the date of the two ships wintering at Beechey Island was 1845–6 and not 1846–7. The winter of 1846–7 was clearly spent in the ice in the position described in the document. We know, therefore, that on May 28, 1847, all was well with the expedition, and doubtless all were yet full of hope that they would accomplish the desire of their hearts and make the North-West Passage.

But upon the same paper a later date and further record was added, and the writing was in another hand, as follows:—'April 25, 1848.—H.M. ships *Erebus* and *Terror* were deserted on 22nd April, five leagues N.N.W. of this, having been beset since 12th September, 1846. The officers and crews consisting of 105 souls, under the command of Captain F. R. M. Crozier, landed here in latitude 96° 37' 42" N.—longitude 98° 41' W. Sir John Franklin died on the 11th June, 1847; and the total loss by deaths in the Expedition has been to this date nine officers and fifteen men.' This was signed by both Captain Crozier and Captain Fitzjames,



and a footnote added 'and start on to-morrow, 26th, for Back's Fish River.'

And then commenced that fatal march when no less than 105 brave English sailors started to walk, and to drag heavy boats, along the shores of King William Island, hoping to reach the mouth of the Great Fish River, and to ascend it to one of the Hudson's Bay Company's stations, from whence succour could be had. And it is lamentable to think that at the very moment when Captain Crozier penned those last few words which ever in this world he was to write—'and start on to-morrow, 26th, for Back's Fish River'—there was a noted Arctic traveller, a former companion of Back's, begging and entreating of the English Admiralty Board of that day to let him go to the help of Franklin's party by way of that very Great Fish River, with every inch of which he was acquainted, and at the entrance to which he would have come upon the famishing party just in time to save their lives.

Captain Crozier and his party of 105 English sailors left their ships on April 22, 1848, but on June 10, 1847, Dr. King wrote a letter to Earl Grey, the then Colonial Secretary, pointing out that the missing expedition was in all human probability on the western coast of North Somerset, which then was thought to be only a continuation of King William Island; and that, therefore, its members would be found by a journey down the Great Fish River. Will it be believed? His letter was certainly officially acknowledged, but it never received any answer at all. Amongst all the many and costly expeditions which had been sent out by a grateful country, surely one more might have been encouraged, and that a most inexpensive and simple one, the *raison d'être* of which was the almost absolute certainty that an English naval captain *had* gone whither his instructions directed him to go.

And meantime those poor souls starved and hoped, and dropped down dead as they walked; and, of all their number, only the corpses of thirty men and a few graves were found at the mouth of the Great Fish River, five dead bodies on Montreal Island, the skeleton of the steward, and two skeletons in a boat about fifty miles from Point Victory.

The supposition is that the fatal retreat was made some time during the short summer of 1848, and that, with the exception of those few whose bodies were discovered, all the rest had found a grave at nature's hands in the shape of the winter snow, beneath which all traces of them were hidden from the view of both Hob-

son and McClintock, who travelled over the very same ground as that by which the retreating Franklin party had endeavoured to reach the Great Fish River, but which, when those two officers passed over it, was covered with thick snow, beneath which all the rest were lying buried, as it was in the case of the one solitary skeleton found by McClintock, and of which he writes, 'Shortly after midnight of the 25th May, when slowly walking along a gravel ridge near the beach, which the winds kept partially bare of snow, I came upon a human skeleton, partly exposed, with here and there a few fragments of clothing appearing through the snow. The skeleton, now perfectly bleached, was lying upon its face; and it was a melancholy truth that the old Esquimaux woman spoke when she said, that they fell down and died as they walked along.'

It was then eleven years since all this had happened; it is now just four times eleven years; and while men and women, not then born, are now reading this narrative of facts, comfortably seated by their firesides, those whitened bones of Arctic heroes long gone to rest still lie bleaching beneath the northern snow, their faces turned towards that far-off home they never more could reach, and looking to the very last for help that never came.

*THE COUNTESS RADNA.*

BY W. E. NORRIS,

AUTHOR OF 'MATRIMONY,' 'HEAPS OF MONEY,' ETC.

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

## FRANK TAKES A CONSTITUTIONAL.

ONLY a few exceptional persons—and these are for the most part women—can really like country-house life during the height of the summer. Still the course of this world is so providentially ordered that compensations are almost always discoverable, and it may be regarded as some sort of compensation for the lack of anything to do which belongs to the months of July and August that hostesses are usually willing to let you do what you please at that season of the year, so long as you absent yourself from the house between meal-times. Frank Innes, therefore, was asked no questions and was driven to resort to no prevarications before he set forth, on that hot, cloudless Wednesday morning, to walk to the village of Stoke Morton, which was situated at a distance of nearly four miles from Swinford Manor. His way lay across level lands and broad fields of wheat and barley; there was no shade and no breeze; for choice, he would naturally have preferred to be seated either upon or behind a fast-trotting horse; but he had deemed it unwise to embarrass himself with a groom, and he plodded along cheerfully enough, with the church-spire which marked his destination growing more and more distinct every minute against the soft blue sky.

Of course he arrived long before the appointed hour and had time to learn by heart the names and ages of all the rude forefathers of the hamlet; but he did not mind waiting. He would have waited contentedly all day and all night if he could but have felt positive that Lady Florence would prove faithful to her tryst; but what kept him in a fever of heat, impatience, and anxiety was the thought that perhaps, after all, she might have been detained at home against her will. The dead silence of noonday added confirmation to his misgivings: surely in that universal stillness the wheels of a pony-cart must have been heard half a mile away

if there had been the sound of any wheels to hear! When the husky old clock over his head struck half-past twelve, he was a miserable and despairing man. It seemed certain that she could not have come, because she was sure to be due at home for luncheon, and nobody lunches later than two o'clock, while some people lunch half an hour earlier. He had decided that he would make his way to the almshouses and ask for old Eliza—old Eliza who, although not the rose, had lived so near the rose—when he was made to start abruptly to his feet by a smart dig in the back. There she was! She had stolen noiselessly across the grass behind him and was smiling at him calmly, the outstretched sunshade with which she had assaulted him in her hand.

'Great success!' she exclaimed, breaking out into a peal of laughter. 'I have been watching you for the last three minutes, and I thought I would make you jump if I could. How you *did* jump! Another grain or two of powder and you would have been clean out of your skin! Yet one would have thought that you might have expected to see me.'

This was all very well, and Frank, being as youthful as his companion, enjoyed himself for a short space after a juvenile fashion; but when he had made her sit down upon a flat tombstone beside him, he pointed out to her that the occasion was not one for thoughtless merriment. 'It's serious, you know—most abominably serious,' said he. 'And I suppose,' he added, with a sigh, 'our time is limited, isn't it?'

Lady Florence glanced at the little watch which she wore in a bracelet on her wrist. 'Limited to a quarter of an hour,' she replied; 'there's no stopping Eliza when once she begins to talk. Even as it is, I shall have to flog the pony, who is as fat as a pig and as lazy as a tortoise.'

'Only a quarter of an hour!' groaned Frank. 'And there is such a lot to be said!'

'Oh, no; indeed there isn't,' returned Lady Florence, the smile fading from her lips; 'there's nothing to be said—nothing that can make any difference. I wanted to see you just once more, that was all. You can't save me, and I can't save myself.'

'What do you mean?' cried Frank in consternation. 'Not that you have knocked under to that wicked old mother of yours, and that you are going to accept Galashiels! Oh, no; nothing would make me believe that of you!'

'Why shouldn't you believe it?' asked the girl. 'That sort

of thing does happen ; it is always happening. It doesn't happen in novels and plays, except as an introduction to a catastrophe ; but in real life it is as common as possible, and catastrophes don't follow. How can it be helped ?'

'How can it be helped ! Why, by the least little show of obstinacy, I should think. How can it be done without your consent ? You said the other day that you hadn't promised me not to marry that cad ; but you did promise—or, at all events, I understood you so. And you told me that you loved me too. Have you changed since then ?'

'My being here doesn't look as if I had, does it ? You can't understand, and it wouldn't be any use to try and make you understand. If I am not to marry you—and of course that is impossible—I don't think I care much whether I marry Lord Galashiels or somebody else. I shan't be allowed to remain single, and it is better to have a tooth out at once than to suffer tortures for a year, or two years, and then have to go to the dentist's after all.'

'You talk as if they could make you marry ; but they can't really make you—you know they can't ! And as for our marriage being impossible, it's nothing of the sort. I am perfectly certain that by the time that you are of age I shall be earning a large enough income to marry upon ; the only question is whether you care enough for me to wait until then. Of course I mustn't and I won't ask you to bind yourself ; still, when you come to think of it, that *is* the only question.'

Frank spoke with a great deal of emotion and with some unintentional sharpness. It seemed to him that a love which could not hold out against the futile menaces of a painted old shrew was hardly worthy of the name of love, and, although he had disclaimed any pretension to bind Lady Florence, he thought in his heart that she ought to proclaim herself either bound or free. Why had she consented to meet him if that was all that she had to say to him ?

She threw an appealing glance at him, which he did not choose to see, and remarked : 'I knew you wouldn't understand ; men never do. It's because you don't live at home. You have rows with your fathers sometimes about bills and things ; but as soon as the row is over you go away, and there's an end of it. There's never an end of it with girls : besides, we can't feel sure that we aren't undergoing miseries which you have no notion of for

nothing. I think I know that you love me now ; but I don't know in the least, nor do you, that you will love me when I am twenty-one. So you see——'

'I see,' interrupted Frank, 'that you are ready to surrender yourself, soul and body, to Lady Burcote and Galashiels ; that's all I see at present. And I must say that I thought you had more courage.'

Lady Florence snatched her handkerchief out of her pocket and began to cry. She declared, between her sobs, that she had always been accounted plucky and that she would brave her mother if anything could be gained by braving that redoubtable lady. But what hope or chance was there ? 'I shall never be allowed to see you ; I shall never know where you are or what you are doing ; you will meet heaps of girls much nicer in every way than I am ! I am not heartless or selfish, though you want to make me out so, and I can't help it if you prefer scolding me to allowing me just one happy quarter of an hour to look back upon. I wish I hadn't come here !'

When lovers fall out, and when one of them has recourse to tears, we all know what line of action the other is prone to adopt. Frank was not disobedient to the behests of Nature, and an incipient quarrel was speedily resolved into a renewal of vows which may mean much or little, according to circumstances. How much they might mean in this particular instance was just what Mr. Innes was very eager to ascertain as soon as he recovered partial possession of his reasoning faculties ; but the information vouchsafed to him was scarcely as definite as he could have wished it to be. Lady Florence, by the time that her pony-carriage had been waiting ten minutes for her at the lych-gate, had indeed promised that she would do her utmost to remain faithful to him ; but she had not distinctly specified what was implied in her utmost. How could she ? 'All sorts of dreadful things may happen,' she said. However, she did think that she might undertake to refuse Lord Galashiels a second time, and perhaps, since he was so bumptious and self-satisfied, he would go off in a rage and decline returning thrice to the charge. Meanwhile, she implored Frank to leave the neighbourhood. She dared not run the risk of meeting him privately again, while it would be both dangerous and unsatisfactory to meet him in public. By all means let him go abroad and study music, as he proposed ; if they both kept up their friendship with Miss Rowley, some means of indirect communication

might be discovered later on. But for the present it was much safer and better that the English Channel, as well as several hundred miles of dry land, should be placed between them.

Fortified by these somewhat vague assurances, and comforted by others which have not been recorded here, but which were not at all vague, Frank plodded back towards Swinford Manor, sublimely indifferent to the circumstance that his prolonged absence might have been noticed and commented upon. The sunny landscape looked less flat and uninteresting and unsympathetic than it had done a short time before; the heat felt less oppressive; the world appeared to be, upon the whole, a better and more cheerful place; though, to be sure, it still admitted of improvement. The mere fact of having heard a girl say 'I love you' should not (especially when she has already said the same thing a score of times) suffice so to affect the mental condition of a sensible man; but if we were all sensible, we should never be young, and if we were never young, our birth would be an unqualified misfortune.

A gentleman who, although still young, enjoyed the reputation of being rather more sensible than the majority of his neighbours chanced at that moment to be giving himself and his cob a little gentle exercise by cantering along one of the grass-bordered lanes which Frank had to traverse, and he drew rein on catching sight of the pedestrian.

'Hullo, Frank!' he called out; 'where have you sprung from?'

'I haven't sprung from anywhere in particular,' answered the other. 'I'm staying with Miss Rowley, you know, and I'm out for a constitutional. One can't loaf about the garden all day long. It would be more to the purpose if I asked you where you had sprung from. I thought you were bound to be within hail of Westminster and Whitehall.'

'Not during the recess,' said Douglas, smiling. 'I came home last night, and I am all alone; so when you are tired of loafing about Miss Rowley's garden and taking constitucionals, perhaps you will come and keep me company.'

Frank shook his head. 'Thanks awfully; but I'm afraid I can't,' he replied. 'I'm going abroad to complete my musical education, and I ought to be off at once.'

'What—this very day?'

'Oh, I don't know about to-day; but to-morrow or next day,



perhaps. You see, if I'm to do any good, I must look sharp about it.'

'That's it, is it? H'm!—well, I dare say you are right, and I doubt whether you are doing much good here, any way. There's a jaunty, unconcerned look about you, my dear Frank, which is evidently meant to conceal either grief or guilt. One doesn't want to display impertinent curiosity; still, if you didn't mind telling me, I *should* like to know whether Lady Florence ordered you out of the country when you met her just now.'

'How on earth did you know that I had met her?' exclaimed Frank, opening his eyes.

'I didn't; it was only a shot. I had heard that she was in these parts, and I couldn't quite believe that you were tramping across country under a broiling sun merely for the purpose of keeping your fat down. That young woman seems to have all the imprudence, as well as the prudence, of her family. I won't betray either her or you this time; but I'm glad she has persuaded you to take yourself off, and I hope you won't arrange any more clandestine meetings with her after she has become Lady Galashiels. It wouldn't be an altogether unprecedented thing in her family, you know, to —'

'Oh, shut up!—shut up!' interrupted Frank; 'you don't know what you are talking about. There's nothing in common between her and her sisters. Besides, she isn't going to be Lady Galashiels. At least, I hope and believe she isn't. I should like to tell you all about it; only I can't if you will persist in misrepresenting people.'

Douglas declared that he would abstain from misrepresenting anybody, and, in consideration of that formal promise, he was at once admitted into the full confidence of his cousin. He could, however, only shake his head over the recital of Frank's intentions and hopes.

'The fact is that you are asking too much,' he said. 'It's a simple enough matter for you to wait a year or so, but I suspect it would be a precious hard matter for her. Moreover, I must confess that I don't feel as sanguine as you do about your making a lot of money in a short time. I may be able to help you out a little; but what I could offer wouldn't be nearly enough to tempt Lady Burcote, and —'

'But, my dear old man, the point of the whole thing is that we aren't going to ask Lady Burcote's leave; we're going to be of

age and assert our independence, don't you see? And I certainly couldn't think of letting you help me out with money more than you are doing already—perhaps not as much. The way you really could help us—you and Miss Rowley—would be by acting as sort of links between us during all the long time that we shall be separated. I don't mean to suggest that you should convey letters, or anything of that kind; but you might just remind her of me every now and then, and perhaps she might sometimes give you a message for me.'

Douglas shook his head more emphatically than ever. 'Quite out of the question,' he answered. 'Miss Rowley, of course, can do what she pleases; but I am not going to be mixed up with anything underhand. Moreover, you make a very great mistake if you fancy that Lady Burcote's power consists in her legal privileges. I suppose you will think me unfeeling; but really and truly you had much better make up your mind at once to the inevitable.'

Frank shrugged his shoulders. 'To tell you the honest truth, I do think you're a little bit unfeeling,' he confessed; 'still, I don't deny that you are right, from the common-sense point of view. There are other points of view, though; and Miss Rowley, who has about as much common sense as most people, can see them. I wish you would come over and have a talk with her, because I'm sure she is on my side, notwithstanding her pretence of washing her hands of the whole business.'

'I shall be very glad to go to Swinford Manor if Miss Rowley invites me,' answered Douglas; 'but I am afraid I can't go unless I am asked, for I have been in her black books of late—why I can't tell. One never can tell what women are after, and I shouldn't advise you to rely too much upon her partisanship. Not that you will listen to my advice, or that my talking your affairs over with her would serve any purpose.'

'Douglas,' said Frank gravely, 'I'll tell you what it is: you're soured. That's what's the matter with you; and a great duffer you are to allow yourself to be soured in this way. Now, I was talking the other day to Leonforte, who isn't half a bad fellow when you get to know him, and my belief is——'

'For Heaven's sake,' exclaimed Douglas, gathering up his reins hastily, 'let that sleeping dog lie! I have heard and seen more than enough of him, and I assure you you won't sweeten my sour nature by repeating any of his speeches to me. Be off to

foreign lands, and let me have a line from you as soon as you have come to your senses.'

Frank received a severe scolding, that afternoon, from his hostess, who contrived without much difficulty to extract from him an unreserved confession of what he had been about. She told him that such goings-on would not do at all, and expressed the utmost astonishment when he boldly asserted that she had given a tacit consent to them.

'Oh, you're crazy—downright crazy!' she declared; 'it would be a waste of breath to dispute with you. Indeed, your craziness is the only excuse for your reckless behaviour. A pretty mess you would have landed me in if Lord Burcote had caught you embracing his daughter! Happily, you are going abroad: if you had been going to stay in England, I suppose one's clear duty would have been to send you flying out of one's front door. By the time that you come back again the stern logic of facts will probably have convinced you that there isn't much room for romance in the nineteenth century.'

'That's Douglas's view,' remarked Frank. 'I wasn't surprised at him; for he has had rather a sickener, and perhaps it's only natural that he should be down upon all women; but I didn't expect to hear such sentiments from you. Why should you take it for granted that Florry has no heart and no courage?'

'I take it for granted that Florry, as you call her (and as you have no business to call her), is a girl like another; and Douglas Colborne was no fool if he told you that there are a thousand complications which are likely to prevent her from doing what you so coolly request her to do. You have seen him, then?'

'Yes; I met him on my way back from Stoke Morton. I wanted him to come over here and have a chat with you; but he said he was in your black books, for some reason or other, and he wouldn't come without a formal invitation. I was sorry at the time; I don't much care now, since it seems that you quite agree with him.'

'So far as you are concerned, I probably do agree with him. I didn't know I had disagreed with him about anything else, and I can't think what he meant by saying that he was in my black books. However, I dare say he will recover himself in time, and if he doesn't, I must endeavour not to break my heart. Did you say you would have to leave to-morrow?'

Frank had not contemplated quite so precipitate a departure;

but his feelings were hurt, and he replied unhesitatingly that such was his intention. He was not pressed to reconsider it; only, on the following morning, just as he was taking his leave, Peggy could not restrain herself from breathing one or two parting words of comfort to him.

'I can't do anything for you,' she said; 'you oughtn't to have expected it. Still I don't mind owning that I wish I could. And if I were in your place—well, I won't say what I was going to say; but you may take my word for it that, in cases of this kind, an ounce of audacity is worth tons of patience. Goodbye: you won't be forgotten before the autumn. At least, I don't think you will.'

#### CHAPTER XXXVIII.

##### DR. SCHOTT PRONOUNCES SENTENCE.

THE Countess's health did not improve, while her spirits and her temper remained in an unsatisfactory condition, after her summary dismissal of Leonforte. She did not want to stay in Paris; but she did not particularly want to go anywhere else, and it was only in obedience to the reiterated entreaties of Dr. Schott that she consented at length to betake herself to Aix-les-Bains for a time.

'God knows,' said the Doctor confidentially to the Baroness von Bickenbach, 'it is not the waters of Aix-les-Bains, or of any other place where there are mineral springs, that will do her any good; but she must be amused somehow or other, and I have found out that she will be *en pays de connaissance*' (*bays de gqnnnaissance*, he pronounced it) 'down there. She will meet the Duchesse de Chalmaison, the Princess Kischineff and other great ladies, not to speak of a swarm of those young Frenchmen with whom she likes to surround herself, and who, between ourselves, are not the finest specimens of a decaying race. Still, provided that they amuse her, that is all that we need to ask of them.'

Bickenbach sighed and remarked that she would rather have heard that the Countess proposed to spend the summer in England.

'Suggest that plan to her, then,' returned the Doctor, shrugging his shoulders. 'It did not succeed very well last time; but if you believe in a repetition of the dose, by all means suggest it. For my own part, I am not anxious to have my head bitten off.'

Perhaps Bickenbach was equally devoid of any such ambition, or perhaps, having burnt her fingers once, she shrank from trying further experiments upon a lady who was not much given to accepting unasked-for advice. At any rate, she kept her opinions to herself; and, after all, Aix-les-Bains, when the establishment had been transferred thither, seemed likely to produce the desired effect upon the invalid.

The Countess was really an invalid by this time. Her cough was excessively troublesome; she had lost weight; she slept badly, and her nerves were in such a constant state of irritation that she was by no means the pleasantest person in the world to live with. Nevertheless, she did derive benefit from the change of scene and from the society of the bright little Savoyard watering-place. The French Duchess, the Russian Princess, the pallid dandies—all these people, with their chatter, their *liaisons*, and their wearisome old scandals, did not satisfy her soul; yet they filled up her time, and she could not help associating with them. In Paris she could live alone, shut her doors against visitors, and brood over her troubles; but such a mode of existence was scarcely possible at Aix, and, in spite of herself, she yielded to the influence of surroundings which, when all was said, had become not only habitual but almost essential to her. That kind of thing was life, so far as life could be understood or enjoyed by a woman in her position: she did not forget that she had tried something different and that she had not liked it.

So she joined in picnics and excursions; she dined with her friends, and her friends dined with her; and Bickenbach, to whom Leonforte's disappearance from the scene had come as an immeasurable relief, began to hope that happier times were in store for her and for her patroness. This excellent and kind-hearted woman received a shock as terrible as it was unexpected when she was joined, one evening, on her way homewards from a sketching expedition, by Dr. Schott, who was smoking a long pipe and contemptuously surveying the smartly attired passers-by.

'What a deplorable crew!' he exclaimed. 'Three fourths of them will be dead five years hence, and it will serve them right, and the world will be well rid of them. The world is already overpopulated; it has no need of people who can only prolong their useless existence by means of mineral waters and baths. Admitting, that is to say, that the mineral waters and baths do prolong the existence of those who resort to them—which is extremely doubtful.'

The Baroness shook her fore-finger at him with middle-aged sprightliness. 'Oh, what a shocking doctor!' she cried. 'It does not become you to sneer at your own remedies—particularly when they have turned out to be so efficacious in the case of your own patient. During the last week the Countess has become almost herself again, Heaven be praised!'

'Praise Heaven as much as you please,' returned Doctor Schott, removing his pipe from his lips and blowing a cloud of smoke into the still air; 'there can be no harm in your doing that, although you might have selected a more fitting occasion for thanksgiving. Certainly the Countess is herself; Heaven, which sent her into being with an inherited tendency to phthisis, has not seen fit to make her the subject of a miracle by converting her into somebody else. In our days miracles no longer occur; and that is why the Countess Radna will be dead and buried as soon as the rest of them—perhaps sooner. For my part, I do not return thanks and I do not complain: what cannot be helped can only be submitted to.'

Bickenbach dropped her sketching-book and threw up her hands. '*Ach, du lieber Gott!*' she shrieked. 'But you are not serious!—you do not mean what you say!'

'I mean,' returned the Doctor composedly, 'that there is organic disease. I do not say that she is dying. With care, she might be kept alive for an indefinite length of time; only she is a bad patient, because she is so excitable. This place has done her good mentally; physically she is neither better nor worse than she was when she left Paris. We all know how the body is affected by the mind, and it is doubtless important that her life should be made agreeable to her: it is also very important indeed that she should not catch cold. But if you ask me what chance she has of being restored to health, I must tell you that she has no chance at all.'

Dr. Schott here embarked upon a lengthy and dispassionate medical harangue with which there is no necessity to afflict the reader. Bickenbach, who was terribly afflicted by it, was informed, in conclusion, that it had been delivered to her merely for her guidance, and was instructed to refrain from breathing a word of it to the Countess. Consumptive patients, she was told, very seldom realise their condition and ought always to be kept in the dark: while there is life there is hope; and when hope flies away life speedily follows. What can be done, and what should be done,



for those who are under sentence of death is to gratify their whims and submit to their petulance. In that way their brief journey towards the cemetery may be made easy for them.

All this was inexpressibly painful to the poor old Baroness, and was perhaps also painful to her companion, although he had the advantage of her in being a philosopher and in having kept watch for many years o'er man's mortality. But irremediable situations must perforce be acquiesced in, and Bickenbach contrived to play the part assigned to her with less effort than she could have believed possible. After a day or two she took comfort from the thought that actual danger was probably remote. Dr. Schott himself had said that the Countess's life might be indefinitely prolonged; the main thing was to neglect no precaution and to take extra care of one who was not much given to taking care of herself. If only it were permissible to make a second appeal to Mr. Colborne, whose cold Britannic pride and displeasure would surely be overcome by an intimation of his wife's state of health! But Dr. Schott, when this course was timidly suggested to him, made a grimace and declined to associate himself with any such perilous enterprise.

'A diseased lung,' said he, 'cannot be healed in that way. Besides, she is no longer in love with the Englishman. You would only enrage her by sending for him, and it is not good for her to be enraged.'

The Doctor's judgment may have been at fault. His patient would, no doubt, have been enraged by a proposal that her husband should once more be summoned from England; but whether she would have been enraged by his appearance in obedience to a summons, and whether, if she had been, her health would have suffered through rage of that kind, is less certain. Meanwhile, she was far from suspecting that sentence of death had been passed upon her by a competent physician, and she continued to amuse herself tolerably well until a spell of wet weather set in, which caused her to issue marching-orders with her customary abruptness.

She had no particular reason for removing herself and her retinue to the high Alps, except that Dr. Schott strongly opposed the plan. Indeed, it is scarcely at Chamouni or Zermatt that sunshine can be looked for while rain is falling in torrents over the whole of central Europe, and wet summer snow is perhaps even more dismal than summer rain. The Countess had a bad time of



it, both mentally and physically, during her sojourn in chilly, draughty hotels, crammed with grumbling tourists. The food was bad ; she could not, for love or money, obtain half the number of rooms that she required ; she insisted upon walking out to see what chance there was of the clouds clearing away sufficiently to enable her to effect her escape, and, as a matter of course, she caught a bad cold. Then it was that for the first time she became seriously alarmed about herself. There are symptoms of which nobody can mistake the significance ; she noted that Dr. Schott, whom she had always looked upon as a persistent croaker, affected to make light of these, and one day she asked him suddenly whether she was going to die. He responded with a loud laugh, declaring that everybody was going to die, but that very few people died of a cold in the head. 'He wouldn't have said that a year ago,' reflected the Countess ; 'he would have said that, unless I did this, that, or the other, I should be practically guilty of suicide.'

The thought of approaching dissolution affects different people in different ways ; and, curiously enough, those who confidently look forward to an eternity of bliss are often more terrified by it than those who, like the Countess Radna, are unable to discern any future on the other side of the grave. Yet to all it must needs come as a sort of revelation, changing the general aspect of the world and its inhabitants, reducing trifles to their true proportions, magnifying what may hitherto have seemed to be trifles, and exhibiting in a strange, clear light the utter insignificance of one poor, solitary human creature amongst the millions who for a time jostle one another upon the surface of this globe. The Countess was not frightened, though she was saddened and a little startled. She had never coveted long life ; she had always recognised the fact that, for one constituted as she was, the loss of youth must needs imply a living death ; she had said over and over again that she hoped to die young ; she was not happy, nor did she expect that any number of coming years could bring her happiness. Still she had probably retained some unconscious, undefined hope which she was now forced to relinquish ; for tears of self-pity filled her eyes when she lay awake at night and mused upon her doom. She said nothing to the Doctor or to Bickenbach, perceiving that they had entered into a compact to deceive her for her own good ; but they did not deceive her : now that she possessed the clue to their conduct, they betrayed themselves a

dozen times a day; moreover, she knew by her own sensations that her race was nearly run. What, then, awaited her? It was impossible to say, and she was oddly devoid of curiosity upon the subject. The myth of Christianity, which she had rejected, might prove, after all, to have been no myth, but sober truth. In that event, she would surely not be condemned to everlasting and purposeless torments because of her inability to believe in dogmas incredible to human reason. She had no great sins upon her conscience, if she had not the memory of many righteous deeds upon which to plume herself; she had tried to help her neighbours; she had been generous to her dependents; she had injured no man—unless, indeed, her husband might take it into his head to consider that he had been injured by her. Annihilation seemed more likely; and she hardly knew why she shrank from the notion of being wiped out of conscious existence at once and for ever. Perhaps it was because she could not forget that dead baby who had preceded her and whom she had never ceased to mourn.

When at length the rain and the snow ceased, and when she was pronounced fit to travel again, she descended from the mountains to the Italian lakes. Dr. Schott recommended Bellaggio, and she did not think it worth while to gainsay him. She had, in truth, grown singularly amiable and amenable all of a sudden; for her loneliness had been brought home to her, and she felt an eager and pathetic longing to be loved by the paid companions whose hands must close her eyes when all was over. Companionship which was not paid for, and which was destined to arouse her for a time from her melancholy self-communings, was, however, at hand. She had not altogether forgotten her young friend Frank Innes; but it was certainly not with him that her thoughts were occupied as she sat upon the terrace in front of the hotel, one fine, warm evening after dinner, gazing at the darkening lake and the little boats with which its smooth surface was dotted. So that she was as much surprised as she was pleased when Frank's voice exclaimed, close to her ear:

'To think that I should meet you, of all people, in this beautiful, stagnant, intolerable place! What a rare stroke of luck!'

'I am far more likely to be met with in beautiful, stagnant places than you are,' returned the Countess, holding out her hand and smiling at him; 'I have an eye for beauty, and I don't much mind stagnation in these days. But you ought to be in England, shooting some kind of bird or beast, ought you not?'

Frank dragged an iron chair across the gravel, seated himself upon it, and explained succinctly how it had come about that he was wasting his time upon the shores of the Lake of Como. He had, it appeared, visited Dresden, Leipzig, and Munich, only to find that professors of music and vocalists were absent on their annual holiday; he was now on his way to Milan, where he had been assured that he would meet with more skilled instructors than Germany could boast of; only there was no great hurry about it, because the Milanese schools also were said to be closed for the present. He was, therefore, endeavouring to enjoy a period of enforced idleness, and his efforts, so far, had been rewarded by no sort of success.

'As you very truly say,' he remarked, 'one ought to be shooting, or at least playing cricket or something, when one hasn't any work to do, and pulling about on this beastly old lake in a boat almost as heavy as an ordinary barge is rather poor fun. But, thank goodness, you're here, and now we can have a good long talk.'

He had already been talking for some little time, and had informed her of his professional ambition, in which she was much interested. He had not mentioned Douglas Colborne, nor had he noticed any alteration in her appearance. Indeed, he had casually remarked, with that careless optimism which belongs to youth and health, that she was looking 'uncommonly fit.'

She knew that he was only blind because he had not taken the trouble to see; she knew that he had abstained from speaking of his cousin simply because he had not chanced to think of that absent offender; yet human nature is weak, and she could not help being pleased with him both on account of what he had said and what he had left unsaid. Besides, she was really feeling stronger and better than usual that evening.

'Take me out for half an hour in one of the boats that you call barges,' she said, rising abruptly. 'I have been ill, I must tell you, and I am not supposed to be out after sunset; but my doctor has fallen asleep over his pipe, and I have given my duenna the slip, and I have a fancy to go out on the water before they come to drive me indoors. You won't find me an enormous addition to the weight of the boat.'

Frank assented without hesitation or compunction. 'I expect your doctor is a donkey, like most doctors,' said he. 'As if it could possibly hurt anyone to be out of doors on such an evening

as this ! Come along, and we'll drift quietly across to Cadenabbia and back. I've half a hundred things to tell you yet.'

A few minutes later the Countess was comfortably esconced in the stern of the smallest boat that could be discovered, while Frank, bending over the sculls which he was lazily manipulating, confided to her willing ear one out of the fifty communications which he had professed to have on hand. The odd forty-nine (if indeed there were so many) were all of them connected with that one, and he dwelt upon it at such extreme length as to leave himself little time for entering upon subsidiary details.

The Countess heard him out patiently and sympathetically. Not being in love with Lady Florence Carey, she did not, of course, derive any special gratification from listening to exaggerated rhapsodies upon the subject of that young lady's personal charms ; but she adored a good old-fashioned romance, and she perceived how easily Frank's romance might be brought to a satisfactory conclusion in the good old-fashioned way by the intervention of a benevolent outsider. She did not, however, propose at once to make him happy by means of a long cheque and her blessing. Love-matches, as she had sad reason to know, are not unfrequently repented of, and it might be well, before taking decisive steps, to ascertain the earnestness and the fidelity of this interesting couple.

'Have you spoken to my—to Mr. Colborne about all this?' she asked at length.

'Oh, yes, I've spoken to him ; I thought I was bound to do so. But he doesn't approve and he doesn't understand. For one thing, I don't think he is quite clear about a professional singer being a gentleman, and he was dead against my giving up my Government clerkship. Then again, he is convinced that Lord and Lady Burcote will never allow their daughter to marry me, and he doubts whether either she or I will remain constant for several years. In short, he takes the common-sense view, you know.'

'He would be sure to do that ; it is so difficult for a respectable, mediocre Englishman to distinguish between common sense and uncommon nonsense. In reality it is you who are sensible and he who is a fool ; because what we are all struggling after is happiness in some shape or form, and if you would be happier as a public singer and the husband of your Lady Florence than as a bachelor and the head clerk in a Government office, you are quite right to struggle for what you want.'

'That's just what I say!' cried Frank. 'I knew you would see things as I do.'

'Yes; you are right to struggle for what you want, but it doesn't follow that you will get it. If you don't, you must console yourself with the thought that you have done your best, and perhaps, after a time, you may have the further consolation of reflecting that it might not, after all, have been worth getting. I confess that your present scheme doesn't sound to me hopeful; we must try to hit upon something more practical and practicable. I will think it over in the night—I have plenty of time for thinking during the night now—and you must come and see me between twelve and one o'clock to-morrow, when I shall have finished breakfast. Now you can take me back, if you will. It isn't exactly cold; but it is rather chilly, don't you think so?'

Frank thought it was very hot and stuffy; but he noticed that his companion was shivering; he noticed, too, that she had a bad cough and that there was something rather odd and changed about her voice. He hastened to comply with her request, and, as he took leave of her upon the landing-steps, where she was received by Dr. Schott, promised to keep his appointment punctually on the morrow.

The German physician, to whom he had not been introduced, glanced over his shoulder to growl out: 'An appointment at a reasonable hour, I trust, sir! The Countess Radna is under my care, and I will answer for nothing if she is exposed to the night dews again as she has been this evening.'

---

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### THE COUNTESS DEALS WITH THE SITUATION.

THE Countess had spoken only too truly when she told Frank that she always had plenty of time for meditation during the night; but on that particular night her sleepless hours seemed a little less interminable than usual to her, because she had something and somebody besides herself to think about. Amongst those who knew her best she passed for being a somewhat selfish woman; but it was a good deal more her misfortune than her fault that she had so behaved as to earn that character. People who are really selfish are invariably good-natured; they make the best of things;

they take all they can get; they neither ask nor wish for impossibilities. The people who cause trouble and inconvenience are those who, like the Countess Radna, love their neighbours (or shall we say one or two of their neighbours?) better than themselves; and must needs receive daily assurances that their abnormal affection is reciprocated. The Countess had, as we know, been cruelly disappointed in her husband; she had, furthermore, met with little but disappointment in all the attempts that she had ever made to better the condition of the fellow-beings with whom she had been brought into contact; yet she was not so soured by these repeated failures but that she still ardently desired to perform some kindly and useful act before she died; and thus it was that Frank Innes, with his rather commonplace romance, came to her as a godsend.

Commonplace though his romance might be, there were complications connected with it which rendered it at once interesting and perplexing. As far as money was concerned, it had to be borne in mind that Lord Galashiels was too rich a man to be simply and vulgarly outbidden, while there was no very obvious way in which Frank could be helped, save that of pouring money into his hands. Nevertheless, a more excellent way had suggested itself, before the morning, to Frank's wakeful ally. She knew very well what she would do in his place, and she saw no reason why, if he were worth his salt, he should not be equally audacious. In these days there are many impediments, legal and other, to a runaway marriage; yet—given certain conditions—they are not wholly insuperable, and the Countess thought she had it in her power to overrule the scruples which both Frank and Lady Florence would probably feel. Anyhow, that was Frank's only chance. '*Les absents ont toujours tort*,' reflected the Countess. 'He ought never to have left England, and, though she may have told him to go, it is most likely that he took his orders far too literally. She must be very different from other girls if she has no misgivings about him now that he is out of sight.'

Any lingering misgivings that the Countess may have entertained as to the wisdom of her own proposed course of action were removed when the early post came in, bringing her, oddly enough, a letter from an English correspondent which contained an important item of news about Lady Florence Carey.

'I have just heard,' wrote this lady, 'that the Burcotes have at last succeeded in engaging their only unmarried daughter to Lord



Galashiels. I don't know whether you met him when you were in London. He isn't fascinating, and Heaven alone can tell who his grandfather was ; but he has wealth enough to set the Burcotes upon their legs again ten times over ; so I suppose they ought to be congratulated. Especially as, by all accounts, there has been a good deal of trouble in securing him. One is rather sorry for the poor girl, who kicked vigorously, they say ; but then Lady Burcote's daughters should not be so silly as to kick. By the way, the engagement hasn't been publicly announced yet, and I promised not to mention it ; but there can't be any harm in my telling *you*, since you are not likely to be within hundreds of miles of any of us yet awhile, I am afraid.'

Hence it resulted that, when Frank turned up to pay his respects at the appointed hour, he was greeted by a lady who, holding an open sheet of note-paper in one hand and tapping it with the forefinger of the other, said : ' This will teach you to take young women *au pied de la lettre* in future ! I foresaw, while you were relating your pretty story to me last night, what would happen, and now it has happened. You had better take your ticket for London at once.'

' I don't understand what you are talking about,' answered Frank wonderingly. ' What has happened ?'

' Oh, nothing at all extraordinary. Only it seems that Lady Burcote and Lord Galashiels have profited by your retirement, and that, if you don't make haste to prevent it, there will soon be a wedding in the family.'

She then proceeded to read aloud the extract which has been quoted, whereat Frank turned rather white.

' I'm not acquainted with your friend,' he remarked ; ' but, if you'll excuse me for using simple language, I shouldn't wonder if she was telling a lie. Not an intentional one, I dare say ; only, you know, some ladies *are* given to spreading about mere rumours as positive facts.'

' And a great many of them are intentional liars into the bargain. This one may be an intentional liar, and you are not bound to believe her ; still I wouldn't be too incredulous if I were you, because what she says has all the appearance of truth. In any case, you will make no mistake by going back to England and finding out the truth for yourself.'

' I don't see what good that would do,' returned Frank gloomily. ' Either it is a fact that Florry has engaged herself to



that brute, or it isn't. If she hasn't thrown me over, I shall have had my journey for nothing, and if she has—well, then there will be nothing more to be said.'

'Oh, how English you are, with your solemn assumption that there is no such thing in the world as intricacy! Haven't you really intelligence enough to understand that she may have engaged herself to the brute without having thrown you over? Nobody ever yet won a battle by retreating; but plenty of victories have been gained by a rash advance. Now I will tell you in a few words what to do. You return home; you contrive a meeting with Lady Florence—as you seem to have done that once, I suppose you can do it again—you find that she is betrothed to your rival—yes; you must be prepared for that discovery, and you must endeavour to swallow down your reproaches. Well, then you persuade her to make her escape and marry you. You telegraph to me; I receive her in my house in Paris, so that there will be no disregard of propriety; and in a week or a fortnight—I do not know exactly how long a delay the law requires—your marriage takes place. As for the expense, I charge myself with that.'

Frank could not help laughing, though he did not feel particularly merry. The Countess's scheme was delightful; only it laboured under the disadvantage of being, for many reasons, hopelessly impracticable. He mentioned two of these reasons, which seemed to him to be conclusive.

'Even if she could manage to escape from her father's house,' said he—'and I don't believe she could or would—she would infallibly be traced to Paris and followed within a week. Moreover, I couldn't ask her to marry me upon my present income; it isn't large enough. In two years, or perhaps even in a year, it may be; but it isn't large enough now.'

'Oh, if you are going to wait until there are no difficulties to be surmounted, you will wait all your life. The difficulty about her placing herself under my protection is easily solved: as soon as I hear from you that you have obtained her consent, I will write and ask her to stay with me. Lady Burcote, who, you may be sure, is already beginning to think of wedding-presents, is not likely to object. She knows that I am rich and extravagant, and she would be sorry to deprive her daughter of a possible *parure* of diamonds. My riches and my extravagance enable me to snap my fingers at your second difficulty also. Hear me out, please,' she continued, as Frank opened his lips to interrupt her; 'I do not

offer you a fortune. In the first place, you would not accept it; secondly, I could not give you as much as would place you on an equal footing with Lord Galashiels; thirdly and lastly, one would like to make sure that Lady Florence is willing to face a little hardship for your sake. But if she has the courage and sincerity that she ought to have, and if she doesn't mind entrusting you with her future—why, then I think I may claim the privileges of relationship so far as to promise that you shall not starve.'

It was not without some demur and a good deal of feeble argument that Frank yielded to the above representations; but a man of his temperament was certain to yield to them in the long run, and indeed he could not see that there would be much harm in accepting temporary assistance from one who was so very well able to furnish it.

'The only thing is,' said he, after he had practically assented to all the concessions demanded of him, 'that I don't feel as if I had a right to ask all you tell me to ask. It's a strongish measure, you see, for a girl to contract a clandestine marriage and break with her people.'

'Of course it is,' returned the Countess; 'but you ask far more of her when you ask her to refuse all offers until she is of age, upon the chance of your loving her as much then as you do now and having more money then than you have now.'

'Ah, that's what Douglas said.'

'I have no doubt he did. He ought to know, if anybody does, that a man's love is a transient emotion.'

Frank remembered all of a sudden that he had a mission to accomplish, for the carrying out of which the present occasion seemed to be propitious. 'Douglas isn't at all that sort of fellow,' he declared. 'I don't know what is wrong between you, and I can't think that either of you can be to blame; but I'll answer for it that whatever he may be, he isn't fickle. He's as steady as a rock, and——'

'And as unimpressionable. Impressions may be made even upon the surface of rocks, though, by a continual drip, and I suppose the steady persistency of Miss Rowley has at last met with the reward that steady persistency deserves. Far be it from me to grudge her her triumph!'

'Peggy Rowley!' exclaimed Frank; 'you don't mean to say that you suspect her of laying siege to your husband's heart! What can have put such an idea as that into your head? Why

Douglas and she have been friends ever since they were children ! More by token, they aren't quite as good friends at the present moment as they once were. The last time I saw Douglas I wanted him to go and look her up, and he wouldn't, because she hadn't asked him. She seemed to have put his back up somehow or other.'

'If having put his back up means that she has contrived to affront him, I congratulate her,' observed the Countess, smiling. 'One doesn't quarrel with a friend about nothing; but it is always a good plan to quarrel a little with a lover.'

'Is that why you quarrelled with him?'

'I didn't quarrel with him; we parted in order to avoid a quarrel—which shows that we couldn't have been lovers any longer. To be perfectly honest, I will own that I was not quite pleased when I first heard that everybody was talking about him and Miss Rowley; I thought he might have shown better taste—in every way. However, that is of very little consequence now.'

'I don't know what you may have heard or what people may have talked about,' returned Frank; 'but I'm sure he never gave them any excuse for talking nonsense. Why do you say that it is of no consequence now?'

'For reasons which will soon be apparent to you, but which I will keep to myself for the present, if you please. Let us return to your affairs.'

'But may I not take any message from you to Douglas?' persisted Frank. 'I shall have to tell him that I have met you, you know.'

'I have no message to send him, thank you,' answered the Countess. 'Unless, perhaps, he would care to hear that a sort of message which was despatched to him, some time ago, by my companion the Baroness von Bickenbach was despatched without my knowledge or authority. Yes; you may tell him that from me, if you like.'

Frank, knowing nothing about the message alluded to, and hastily assuming that it had been of a hostile character, at once promised to do as he was requested. He made his interlocutor laugh by adding an emphatic assurance of his personal belief in Douglas's fidelity.

'I have no doubt,' said she, 'that you think him a most admirable person, and your judgment is not at fault. Taking him as a whole, I have never met with a person quite so admirable—'

or quite so impossible to live with. We will hope that Miss Rowley doesn't agree with me, and we will now (because there is really no time to be lost) map out your plan of campaign distinctly.'

No one, except a singularly quick-witted and unselfish individual, could have guessed from that that she wanted to hear another word about her husband. Frank, whose wits were not abnormally acute, and who was not more unselfish than the general run of anxious lovers, accepted the change of subject without protest. He likewise accepted, in substance, the programme which the Countess rapidly, but lucidly, submitted to his approval. He professed to be very uncertain as to whether it would meet with acceptance or approval when submitted to Lady Florence; but he acknowledged his inability to replace it by any better scheme, and the gratitude which he expressed before saying good-bye was evidently enhanced by an inward hope that he would ere long have something more definite to be grateful for.

Shortly after he had left her, the Countess sent for Dr. Schott, and said: 'I am going to Paris. I know you will abuse me; but I can't help it. One must buy one's winter clothes, and nothing is so certain to make me ill as badly fitting dresses. Now, it is a fact, though you probably will not believe it, that no dress can ever be made to fit unless it has been tried on at least once; so that in reality this journey is going to be undertaken for hygienic purposes. Besides, I caught cold only the other day, and I am sure you must have noticed that it takes everybody a month or six weeks to catch a second cold.'

Contrary to her anticipation, Dr. Schott asserted no right of veto. 'You have a warm house in Paris,' he answered; 'you may stay there until the middle of November, if you choose. It will be time enough for you to move south when the frosts and the fogs set in. I venture to beg, however, that you will order your winter dresses to be made of woollen materials.'

Later in the day he said to Bickenbach, who consulted him anxiously about the proposed move: 'It does not signify; patients may safely be indulged when they are beyond the reach of remedies. Apparently that young Englishman who took her out on the water last night has told her something which has excited her; perhaps it is in order to meet him again that she has decided to make for Paris. So much the better; for she suspects now that she is dangerously ill, and the only service we can render her is to preserve her, by this means or by that, from falling into a state of despondency which will hasten her death.'

## CHAPTER XL.

## LADY FLORENCE YIELDS TWICE.

THE Careys were commonly spoken of by their intimates as 'a queer lot,' that comprehensive description enabling their intimates to dispense with the labour of analysis. Yet they were not really so very queer, nor so very different from what other people would have been in their place; although it must be owned that some of them had done queer things. What else, indeed, could be looked for from the daughters of their mother? Lady Florence, notwithstanding the mother whom it had pleased Heaven to inflict upon her, had as yet been guilty of no offence much more heinous than that of having once met a young man by stealth in a country churchyard; but it was not improbable that, with the example of her nearest relatives before her, she might eventually be tempted to less excusable conduct, and she was dimly aware of her danger. That was one reason why she wished with all her heart to refuse a man so repugnant to her as Lord Galashiels. It cannot be said that the promise, or half-promise, which Frank Innes had extorted from her was another; because she was persuaded that she never by any possibility could become Frank's wife, and, that being so, she did not see what difference it could make to him whether she espoused Lord Galashiels or somebody else. Meanwhile, her chances of espousing anybody else dwindled daily; for his lordship continued to avail himself of the hospitality which was so willingly extended to him, while it was as certain as anything could be that he did not intend to submit to a second defeat without making a fight for it.

Now, if Lord Galashiels had been equipped for the fray with nothing beyond such strength as he himself possessed, he might have been beaten by a determined antagonist; but what rendered him formidable was that he had an all-powerful ally in the person of Lady Burcote, by whom his attentions and intentions were cordially approved of and seconded. It is altogether irrelevant to assert—as people who are without personal experience of such trials are fond of asserting—that a girl who is worth anything will never allow herself to be driven by a worldly-wise mother into breaking faith with a man whom she loves. The immense majority of us are not worth very much; the immense majority of us have ideals of conduct, more or less lofty, to which we find it

practically impossible to conform, and we really have not the smallest right to condemn a callow maiden whose powers of resistance are limited. Lady Florence believed (and she was not so very far wrong) that her mother was invincible; she knew what had happened in the case of her sisters; she naturally did not like being scolded or punished; and, like all human beings who, by one means or another, have been prevented from exercising their will freely, she had become something of a fatalist. What was to be would be: there was no earthly use in struggling against destiny.

'Florry dear,' said Lady Burcote, after breakfast one morning, 'Lord Galashiels wants to ride over to the kennels. You had better go with him and show him the way.'

The girl made a feeble protest, which she did not expect to be of any avail, and which, when uttered, fulfilled her expectations.

'The bay mare is lame, and there isn't anything else for me to ride,' she said. 'Couldn't Papa go with Lord Galashiels?'

'Your father thinks he is in for another fit of gout, and I am sure he must be right, or he wouldn't be so cross and contradictory. You can take his cob. Now, Florry, I want you to understand that this sort of thing has gone on long enough; it can't go on much longer. Patient as Lord Galashiels is, he won't stand it. I myself have been extraordinarily patient; I have allowed you to fight shy of him and to make excuses for avoiding him all this time because I didn't wish to hurry you. But of course he has noticed it, and of course he isn't best pleased. From what he said just now I gathered that he meant to repeat his offer to you this morning—and an uncommonly lucky girl you are to get such a chance twice, I can tell you!'

'How astonishing men are!' exclaimed Lady Florence. 'He knows that I hate him, because I have as good as told him so. Why can't he look out for some girl who doesn't hate him? There must be lots of them about.'

'Any number,' agreed Lady Burcote dryly; 'but for the present he prefers you to them all. There is nothing astonishing in that; on the contrary, it is quite usual for men to covet what is denied to them, and, as things have turned out, I am not sorry that you began by refusing him. He is inclined to be so uppish that a snub is good for him. All the same, it is possible to go too far; you must not refuse him again.'

'I hate him!' repeated Lady Florence disconsolately.



Her mother glanced at her and returned, 'Don't talk nonsense, please.'

It was not much to say; but Lady Burcote's glance spoke volumes, and the girl went away to put on her habit with a thorough comprehension of what disobedience would entail upon her. Many men and almost all women can face physical pain; but there are certain methods of daily torture from which any method of escape that may present itself must, in common justice and pity, be pronounced permissible.

Half an hour later Lady Florence set out with her detested companion, and before they had advanced a mile towards the kennels (which Lord Galashiels had no desire at all to inspect) the anticipated declaration had been made.

'You needn't tell me,' said the red-headed, broad-shouldered young man, with a touch of resentment in his voice, 'that you don't care for me now; you have taken more pains than there was any need for to convince me of that ever since I have been here. But I care so much for you that I don't mind taking my chance and trusting to luck. I can't live without you, Lady Florence; that's the long and the short of it.'

Lady Florence, staring straight between her horse's ears, remarked, 'You aren't proud.'

'Yes, I am; most people would tell you that I'm devilish—I mean tremendously proud. I'm not at all the sort of fellow to turn the left cheek to anybody who has given me a slap on the right; don't you believe it! But I'd turn both of them to *you*, and if you'd kiss me on the one, God knows you might hit me as hard as you liked on the other!'

Lord Galashiels was rather pleased with this little speech, which surprised him by its appropriate neatness and which slipped off his tongue without any previous preparation. He added, after a momentary pause: 'You *have* hit me pretty hard, as you know; and the proof of how hard I've been hit is that here I am, kicking my heels day after day, instead of being on the moors.'

'Oh, how I wish you would go to the moors!' exclaimed Lady Florence fervently. 'Why don't you?'

'I will as soon as you have promised to be my wife; that's all I'm waiting for. I suppose you think I'm a fool; but I am not. I understand all about it; I know you would never promise anything of the kind if you were free to consult your own inclinations; but the fact of the matter is that you aren't free, and if you refuse to

marry me, it will only end in your being made to marry some other man whom you love as little. Well, as I say, I'm willing to take my chance; and why shouldn't you consent to take yours? If there's nothing else to be said in my favour, it's something that my eyes are quite open to the truth, and that I don't ask you to pretend an affection for me which you don't feel. Very likely the other fellow, whoever he may be, won't be so accommodating.'

It would have been impossible to urge an unwelcome suit in more persuasive terms. Lady Florence hesitated for a few seconds and then said: 'If I consented, would you promise upon your honour to leave for Scotland to-morrow?'

'Yes; I'll agree to that condition.'

'And it's understood that I don't love you a bit, and never shall?'

'It's understood that you don't love me at the present moment; what may come in the future is another affair.'

'No; don't make any mistake about it. If you are kind to me, I shall like you perhaps; but I shall never love you. That is really the truth, and of course I would rather, for choice, marry a man whose eyes were open to it than one who might accuse me afterwards of having humbugged him. Only it does seem very odd that you should still wish to marry me, after what I have told you.'

Lord Galashiels endeavoured to explain why it wasn't odd. He was not successful, having little facility for putting his ideas into convincing language; but he managed to persuade Lady Florence that the average husband is a far more objectionable person than he was likely to prove, and that, after all, was sufficient for his purpose.

Upon the whole, he behaved wonderfully well. On their return home, the betrothal was announced to Lord and Lady Burcote, who sealed it with their benediction, or at least with a modern equivalent thereto; but he ventured upon no familiarities, beyond that of once kissing his *fiancée's* hand, and he honourably fulfilled the terms of his compact by departing for the Highlands on the following morning. The wedding, it was arranged, was to be solemnised in November or December: meanwhile, the bride-elect was 'not to be bothered.' The phrase was her own, and no objection was taken to it. Lady Burcote made it a rule never to bother people who were sensible enough to do as they were told; so for the next week or ten days her daughter had an easy and pleasant time

of it. The time, that is to say, would have been easy and pleasant for Lady Florence if it had not slipped away with such alarming rapidity and if she could have forgiven herself for her treachery to Frank Innes. But this was what, contrary to her anticipation, she found impossible of accomplishment. She loved him; she had told him that she loved him; he would not and could not make any allowances for her; henceforth he would undoubtedly despise her as a traitress. These were simple facts from which there was no escape, and they were present with her by day and by night. Sometimes she thought that, if she could see him once more and lay two or three other simple facts before him, she would be a shade less miserable. 'But perhaps,' she reflected, 'it is just as well that he is abroad. He will have got over his indignation and fallen in and out of love half a dozen times, most likely, before we meet again—if we ever do meet again. All men are like that.'

This precocious judgment upon masculine nature at large, which was the fruit of hearsay rather than of experience, received the refutation that it merited when Lady Florence, walking homewards, one afternoon, after a solitary country ramble, was accosted by a tall, spare, grey-bearded individual, who touched his hat and said:

'Excuse me stoppin' of you, my lady; but I've just been up to see his lordship's gardener about some o' them new chrysanthos, as is turnin' out uncommon poor, I'm sorry to find, and I understood from him as I might meet you, if I was to go back this way.'

'Oh, is that you, Chervil?' said Lady Florence, with a sudden flicker of hope, which as suddenly died away under a conviction of its absurdity. 'I haven't had time to look up old Eliza lately. She is all right, I hope?'

'Right she is, my lady,' answered Peter, 'bein', in a manner o' speakin', beyond reach of earthly misfortuns. Which I wish I could say as much for some as lives in mansions, 'stead of alms-houses.'

Peter drew a note from his breast-pocket, held it up between his finger and thumb, cleared his voice, and proceeded: 'This here billy, my lady, which Mr. Innes, as arrived at Stoke Leighton from the Continent yesterday, quite unexpected, and comin' up for to see me this mornin'—for he's a gentleman as do take a deal o' interest in gardenin', you see, my lady—and owin' to me havin' mentioned casual as I might have to step across to his lordship's in the course o' the day—'

'Give it to me,' interrupted Lady Florence, snatching the envelope out of Peter's hand and thus relieving him from further struggles with a sentence which had escaped his control. 'I suppose you were to take back an answer, weren't you?'

'As your ladyship pleases,' answered Peter, slightly shocked by what struck him as an unseemly disregard for conventionality. His own delicacy had forbidden him to hint that he had undertaken a long tramp across country with no other object than that of surreptitiously delivering Frank's missive; but Lady Florence, who had been brought up in a school which has at least the merit of scorning useless pretence, did not trouble herself to dissemble anything except her agitation. Having torn open the envelope and run her eye rapidly over the few lines which it contained, she said:

'You may tell him that I will be there to-morrow at the same time as before. It will do no good; but I don't suppose it will do much harm either.'

Peter touched his hat and departed, without another word. He was a man of strict integrity, and he did not like to be involved in underhand dealings; but, like many other men of strict integrity, he knew how to make terms with his conscience by ignoring what he was about. He had been asked to deliver a note, and he had delivered it: its contents were no concern of his.

Lady Florence, for her part, did not always care to obey the voice of conscience; and although it was quite plainly her duty to turn a deaf ear to Frank's impassioned entreaty that she would meet him once more, she had no hesitation in turning her back upon her duty. She wanted to see him; she wanted to have one last opportunity of saying things to him which might or might not have the effect of causing him to think of her without rancour in the time that was coming; and it is not impossible that one or two readers of these pages may be acquainted with the keen satisfaction attendant upon conscious and deliberate peccadillos.

To the leniency of such honest and beloved fellow-sinners the present humble chronicler may safely appeal on behalf of poor Lady Florence, who told her mother a little fib on the morrow and who was permitted to drive over to Stoke Morton in her pony-carriage for the ostensible purpose of visiting her old nurse. She did not visit old Eliza, having neither the time nor the heart to enter into details upon the subject of her approaching marriage, and as soon as she had disposed of her pony and her groom at the

village inn, she walked straight to the churchyard, where Frank was impatiently awaiting her.

'Is it true?' was the first thing that he said, after a greeting over the precise nature of which a modest veil shall be drawn.

'Of course it is true,' she answered. 'I told you, you know, how it would be. It is horrible and disgusting and disgraceful and all the rest of it; but it isn't my fault, and—and it doesn't very much matter. If the truth were known, I expect it matters ever so much more to me than it does to you. Don't scold me; that's all I beg of you! If you think I deserve to be punished, I can assure you that I am going to be punished—and pretty severely too! Whatever happens, I shall never love anyone but you: that's what I came here to say.'

'And that's the only thing that I wanted you to say,' Frank declared. 'I did rather hope that you would have had the strength of mind to hold out against Galashiels and your mother; but I dare say I'm no judge of how hard it is to resist the kind of pressure that has been brought to bear upon you, and I certainly don't want you to be punished in the way that you are thinking of. You aren't going to marry Galashiels, let me tell you.'

'Oh, yes; indeed I am!' returned Lady Florence, shaking her head mournfully; 'everything is quite settled.'

'Settlements be bothered! Handsome as his may be, I don't believe they'll tempt you, and I don't believe you are any more afraid of poverty than I am. Come and sit down on this old tombstone while I give an account of myself and of the plot that the Countess Radna and I have been hatching between us. The Countess has been a rare good friend to me, and she wants to be a good friend to you too. At least, I hope you'll think so.'

Lady Florence, when the Countess's audacious project had been revealed to her, did think so, and, as for poverty, she protested airily that that had no terrors for her. She did not, in fact, know what poverty was, whereas she knew very well what love was and guessed also what it would mean to be united for life to a man whom she loathed.

'But I can't bring myself to imagine,' she sighed, 'that such an event could ever come off. It is too wild and improbable! Mamma would be sure to find out all about it; she always does find out all about everything. Besides, what should I do if she simply said that she didn't wish me to accept the Countess Radna's invitation?'

'It will be time enough to think about that when she has said so; but she won't say so,' answered Frank confidently. 'It was only your consent that was essential, and you've given your consent now, Heaven be praised! I'll telegraph to Paris this afternoon, and she'll write to Lady Burcote at once. Would you mind if I were to stand on my head for one little moment?'

'Yes, I should mind very much; there's nothing to stand on your head about; don't be idiotic!' returned Lady Florence. 'Ever so many things have to be considered yet. You are staying with your cousin, I suppose. Doesn't he suspect what has brought you back to England in such a hurry?'

'Now, look here,' said Frank; 'all you have to do is to go to Paris when you are asked: that doesn't commit you to anything, does it? Leave the rest to me, and you'll see how smoothly it will go. I have no doubt Douglas suspects why I have come back—indeed, I'm sure he does—but he won't interfere; he isn't the sort of chap to interfere with things that don't concern him. Moreover, when I take leave of him, he won't ask me where I am going, and I shan't volunteer the information that I am bound for the Avenue Friedland.'

Lady Florence had a good many more objections to urge; but none of them were seriously entertained, or even very seriously put forward. It was agreed that she should let Frank know, either through the post or through Peter Chervil, whether her trip to Paris had been sanctioned or not; and, although the conspirators remained in close conversation until it was high time for one of them to be wending her way homewards, the working out of their conspiracy was not the subject which chiefly engrossed them. For that reason, it will be divined that the remarks which they interchanged before they parted were hardly of a nature to merit repetition.

*(To be continued.)*



